The glamorization of overwork - an empirical study of causes and perceptions of excessive work attitudes in the pursuit of managerial careers

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Abstract

Excessive work behavior remains an issue in pursuing managerial careers. In this context, the glamorization of overwork takes on a crucial role, meaning that unhealthy work behavior is often falsely portrayed in a positive light. This paper provides an overview of influencing factors stimulating overwork behavior and its glamorization within different settings. Relating thereto, a qualitative research approach in the form of semi-structured open interviews was employed. Building on the main propositions of the Job Demands-Resources model (JD-R), this paper finds that individuals are inclined to mirror the behavior of others. In addition, job demands emerging on multiple levels and personality-related intrinsic factors have significant explanatory power for the development of overwork tendencies. The empirical results further reveal that the level of perceived familiarity and trust plays a decisive role in whether individuals are prone to glamorize unhealthy work attitudes. In both professional and non-professional environments, low to medium perceived levels of familiarity and trust in combination with certain stimuli appear to spark the active emphasis on excessive work behavior or the neutralization of strain. In turn, in high-trust settings, this cannot be observed.

Keywords: Workaholism; Overwork; Work engagement; Job Demands-Resources model.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background, problem definition, and relevance of the topic

Changed conditions and perceptions concerning work situations, the value and meaning ascribed to work, and employment uncertainties appearing in the form of decreasing job securities have attracted considerable attention in recent years. In the past, especially in the 1970s, concerns arose that the traditional approach to work would soon become replaced by a greater focus on leisure, a notion which has not been confirmed by research. Today, work ethic continues to be strong and is even amplified in some cases (Harpaz & Snir, 2003, pp. 291–292). Additionally, significant advances in technology or communication are not in fact utilized to generate more spare time for workers (Porter, 2004, p. 436). Instead, research argues that recent changes in organizational landscapes, globally-executed competition among firms, as well as technological developments have exerted firmer pressure on individual employees, as far as their contributions and efforts are concerned (Balducci et al., 2021, p. 6). This implies that in some situations, individuals feel obliged to devote extra hours or overcommitment to their work, develop workaholic tendencies (Harpaz & Snir, 2003, p. 292), or even engage in presenteeism, meaning showing up for work while being ill (Ruhle, Breitsohl, Aboagye, & Baba, 2020, p. 345).

The major implications and consequences of overwork and its different manifestations are investigated in a broad stream of literature across various disciplines, such as economics, organizational psychology, human resource management, and health sciences (Ruhle et al., 2020, p. 344). Overwork can generally be viewed as a harmful state for individual workers, as it is associated with negative effects on one's health and well-being (Burke & Cooper, 2008, p. 65). While research suggests that the human element is incredibly crucial for developing sustainable organizations as a resource, the focus on the physical and psychological well-being of employees also needs to be increased by businesses (Pfeffer, 2010, pp. 2–4). In other words, building an effective organization implies employing a healthy workforce (Burke & Cooper, 2008, p. 4).

The relevance of this topic becomes apparent through consequences emerging from two distinct yet highly interconnected contexts: individuals and organizations. The unfavorable state of overwork leaves individual employees mentally exhausted and emotionally drained, which commonly links to an extensive list of health or well-being-related consequences (Porter, 2004, pp. 424, 436). In addition, compulsive work attitudes may also endanger social functioning, family life, or relationship building, which may overall negatively alter the personal happiness of those affected (Antosz, Rembiasz, & Verhagen, 2020, p. 1006; Harpaz & Snir, 2003, p. 292; Sussman, 2012, pp. 4–5). In Japan, for example, this problem takes on entirely different dimensions. The widely known phenomenon of *karoshi* refers to a syndrome prompted by overwork. This reflects the deterioration of an employee's health to such a vast extent that individuals are either permanently incapable of performing their work or they die (Kanai, 2009, p. 210). Thus, the problematic impacts on an individual are essential to explore further.

Furthermore, overwork also carries substantial costs for organizations and, more broadly, society in general. For instance, Antosz et al. (2020, p. 1006) stress that job performance is significantly worsened, as working excessively long hours may also induce burnout or increase the likelihood of work-related accidents. Moreover, Balducci et al. (2021, p. 9) refer to studies that associate excessive work behavior with reductions in work quality. On top of these arguments, the relevance and urgency of dealing with this issue also become apparent when scrolling through social media platforms. Statements found on social networks, such as Twitter, support this issue further. For instance, a recent post gone viral by Katy Leeson stresses that burnout stemming from overwork is often publicly portrayed as "badges of honor" (Leeson, 2020). The entrepreneur Elon Musk declared in 2018 that "(. . .) nobody ever changed the world on 40 hours a week" via his Twitter account (Musk, 2018), also underscoring the glamorizing of excessive work attitudes and long working hours.

Now that the relevance of the topic of overwork, including a brief overview of the serious risks and consequences has been mapped out, the research objective must be specified. Broadly formulated, this Master's thesis aims to focus primarily on exploring how and why unhealthy work attitudes are encouraged, applauded, or reinforced. In other words, the glamorization of overwork and its underlying causes represent the primary interest of this study. Details of the research aim will be discussed in the subsequent section.

1.2. Research aim

The previous section sheds light on the implications and effects centered around overwork. The consequences associated with such work behaviors have largely been addressed by scholars from multiple disciplines. Therefore, the concept of overwork can be regarded as a thoroughly researched field of interest (see e.g., Burke & Cooper, 2008; Harpaz & Snir, 2003; Ruhle et al., 2020). While such outcomes are crucial in highlighting the relevance and basic nature of this issue, the

causes of and reasons for excessive work attitudes largely remain unclear at this point. Indeed, the question of why individuals are driven to work beyond mental or physical capacities is rarely addressed in relevant academic literature (Burke & Cooper, 2008, p. 61; Peiperl & Jones, 2001, p. 369), resulting in a lack of theoretical frameworks or development in this area (Douglas & Morris, 2006, p. 394). Furthermore, when reviewing related literature, no studies could be identified that specifically address or investigate the glamorization of the overwork phenomenon as such. Therefore, this Master's thesis seeks to address these gaps.

In short, the aim of this study is to identify the nature of persistent unhealthy work attitudes and their various manifestations, particularly focusing on potential causes of overwork. Furthermore, this Master's thesis seeks to scrutinize why excessive work practices are often mistaken for outstanding effort or usual behavior, specifically in the pursuit of successful managerial careers. To this end, this thesis will use empirical results of qualitative interviews to specify, validate, and add to the work's theoretical contributions. The emphasis on managerial career paths in the context of this Master's thesis is due to the fact that overwork seems to be largely concentrated especially in managerial and leadership positions. According to Burke and Cooper (2008, p. xi), statistical evidence shows that managers are particularly prone to working overtime. Galinsky et al. (2005, p. 6) support this with findings from their study, stating that individuals working in managerial positions and in those occupations assigning high levels of responsibility tend to typically be more overworked than others. Moreover, Hassard, Morris, and McCann (2012, pp. 590–592) stress that managerial development trajectories are drastically changing, with mitigating effects on the career prospects of managers in modern organizational contexts, which heightens competition among managers. Relating to this, Liang and Chu (2009, p. 654) further state that competitive work climates are likely to evoke unhealthy work behaviors among co-workers. If higher competition is perceived as intensified work pressure, higher job demands in the form of necessary efforts and skills may translate into job stressors (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 312). The limitation to this group thus excludes other occupations (e.g., in the health or educational sector), as different physical, social, psychological, and organizational aspects are likely to be prevalent in those professional fields (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 311).

In this respect, this Master's thesis aims to build a cohesive understanding of major underlying causes of overwork and must therefore draw on several disciplines and perspectives. Many scholars have assumed that individual characteristics and genetic underpinnings have great explanatory power for overwork tendencies (Burke & Cooper, 2008, pp. 90–92; Mazzetti, Guglielmi, & Schaufeli, 2020, p. 2). However, in line with Mazzetti et al. (2020, p. 2), merely looking at individual traits is insufficient, as causes of such work behavior are considered completely independent of external environmental characteristics. In a similar vein, empirically-established results indicate that the interplay of numerous

factors may cause excessive work attitudes to develop. Efforts toward an integral view have been lacking in previous investigations of overwork (Mazzetti et al., 2020, pp. 1–2). Building on this, several levels of causes will be addressed in this paper.

Using a multilevel approach, this Master's thesis will address the following **research question:**

> *Which individual variables, situational factors and interpersonal relationships stimulate the emergence of excessive work attitudes and consequently, the glamorization of overwork among individuals in the pursuit of managerial careers?*

With regard to the research question, two subordinate goals arise, since theoretical foundations are based on different explanatory approaches, as outlined in this thesis. This again calls for a division into two sub-questions to facilitate achieving the proposed research aim. They can be stated as follows:

> **Sub-question 1:**
>
> *Which individual variables, situational factors and interpersonal relationships stimulate or favor the emergence of excessive work attitudes?*
>
> **Sub-question 2:**
>
> *How does the glamorization of overwork arise from heavy work investment in the pursuit of managerial careers?*

1.3. Selected approach and structure of the thesis

Given the outlined research question and its division into two-sub questions, the structure of this paper is strongly geared towards their comprehensive answering. The first part of this Master's thesis is concerned with understanding the concepts and definitions behind the notion of overwork. This is achieved by means of secondary research in the form of academic journals, as well as through scientific works in the field. In this respect, the theoretical review intends to explain the fundamentals of the issue as a first step, and to then delve deeper into the motivations or causes of those who work beyond their limits.

Following this introduction, the overall definition of overwork and its difference to other related terms and concepts are described in detail. This also involves briefly highlighting the most important consequences and effects of workaholic behaviors at the individual and organizational level. In doing so, this thesis establishes a clear understanding of the phenomenon of overwork. This is crucial since the outlined perspectives will serve as a basis for arguments and concepts introduced later in this work. The Master's thesis then shifts to the different potential aspects acting as causes of overwork behavior and its symptoms. In view of this, this paper will use the theoretical Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), provided that additional literature-based arguments will be framed into its central assumptions. For one thing, external influences prevalent in specific environments and inducements of excessive work originating from social or interpersonal relationships, for instance, with supervisors, colleagues or within family settings will be investigated (see, e.g., Endriulaitienė & Morkevičiūtė, 2020; Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004; Liang & Chu, 2009; Mazzetti et al., 2020; Molino, Bakker, & Ghislieri, 2016). In addition to this, this paper draws on personality theories in order to identify possible personality traits and characteristics of individuals that stimulate or reinforce tendencies toward unhealthy work practices further (see, e.g., Burke & Cooper, 2008, p. 92; Liang & Chu, 2009, p. 657; Stoeber & Damian, 2016, p. 265). Altogether, from a literature-based perspective, sub-question 1 is answered with relevant literature related to the overwork phenomenon, embedded in core assumptions of the JD-R model. Additionally, the conducted empirical investigation in the second part of this thesis will contribute heavily to answering this sub-question.

In a second step, this Master's thesis is concerned with investigating sub-question 2, aiming to answer why overwork is often mistaken for exceptionally high work performance, laudable commitment, or usual behavior, and in some cases, is even publicly glamorized by those affected. Here, two particular research areas are deemed relevant: the notion of work engagement (see, e.g., Korunka, Kubicek, Schaufeli, & Hoonakker, 2009; Mazzetti et al., 2020) and the fundamental ideas behind Alvesson's (2013) concept of the *triumph of emptiness*.

With theoretical findings in mind, this Master's thesis will further empirically expose the causes and motivations behind the glamorization of overwork. Regarding methodology, a qualitative approach by means of in-depth interviews will aim to answer the stated research question. Therefore, the second part of this work presents the research design, collection of data, as well as other relevant aspects in this regard to finally shed light on the results of the empirical research conducted. Following the summary of empirical findings, this thesis ultimately leads to a discussion, which attempts to comprehensibly compile and link theoretical literature-based inputs with practical implications. Finally, this study will conclude with recommendations for future research.

2. Literature review

The following chapter represents the literature-based part of this Master's thesis. The first section aims to clearly outline the concept of overwork to then distinguish the term from similar or related theoretical views as a further step, in order to establish an understanding of the phenomenon and different forms of excessive work patterns. Indeed, a number of factors may appear relevant in explaining what being overworked truly means, while the number of working hours per day or week, as well as the individual preferences regarding how much an employee wishes to work, appear to be of utmost significance (Galinsky et al., 2005, p. 3). Secondly, antecedents or causes of workaholic behavior are discussed in detail. In this regard, particular attention is paid to the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), while situational

or individual factors emerging in this context are also closely assessed. Finally, the glamorization of overwork is linked to relevant literature streams.

2.1. Definition of the term overwork

According to Burke and Cooper (2008, p. 65), overwork can be described as the state at which the number of working hours spent begins to "entail escalating risks or harms beyond those associated with normal, standard, agreed-upon hours". Given this definition, *overwork* takes on a negative connotation. More precisely, cumulative effects of working at overcapacity may seriously impair an individual's mental and physical health, or may also lead to a deterioration of one's quality of life in the long term (Burke & Cooper, 2008, p. 65). These negative effects may not only impact individuals on a personal level, but also affect their families, employers, and when viewed from a broader perspective, entire economies (Burke & Cooper, 2008, p. 65). Peiperl and Jones (2001, pp. 374–375) further suggest that people who engage in overwork lack returns from their employing organization and may thus find themselves stuck in an unreasonable, inequitable working pattern. This necessitates the question of whether individuals working long hours are ultimately classified as being in the state of overwork or not. In this light, Burke and Cooper (2008, p. 65) point out that many individuals confronted with long working hours are indeed overworked; however, this may not apply to all workers. Hence, overwork symptoms may also arise when individuals are not actively working overtime.

Another term arising in this context is overemployment, which represents the state in which an individual, regardless of whether the current level of employment is full-time or part-time, desires to work less, in terms of hours, than he/she does at present. Consequently, when employees are considered overemployed, they perceive an imbalance between preferred working hours and actual working time and are willing to reduce their income at least to a certain degree (Burke & Cooper, 2008, p. 64; Hiemer & Andresen, 2019, pp. 2–3). Hiemer and Andresen (2019, p. 2) suggest that the subjective understanding of overemployment is more heavily weighted than the objective indication of hours worked when studying the phenomenon. Similar to the state of being overworked, research predominantly classifies overemployment as harmful to an employee's psychological and physical well-being and also implies poor job satisfaction (Hiemer & Andresen, 2019, p. 2). Nevertheless, while overemployment is also crucial to consider when discussing the overall issue of overwork, it should be noted that this concept is beyond of the scope of this thesis.

The below-shown figure developed by Burke and Cooper (2008, p. 74) aims to disentangle the most significant terms around the central concept of this thesis, namely, overwork. The point at which individuals find themselves in the state of being overworked may be dependent on job requirements, but also links to their workplace and its prevailing conditions, the organizational culture, incentives geared towards employees, personal preferences, motivations of those concerned, and further similar factors (Burke & Cooper, 2008, p. 75).

While the differentiation between overwork and the concept of workaholism will be established in greater detail in the following subchapter, the demonstrated figure shows that an individual who is considered to be a workaholic cannot be automatically presumed to be overworked or to be working overtime. The same applies to the state of being overemployed, meaning that employees may not ultimately be prone to working long hours when overemployed and may also not suffer overwork symptoms although this holds true for many (Burke & Cooper, 2008, p. 65,74-75). In basic terms, workaholism, the accumulation of overtime and overemployment may lead individuals to be ultimately trapped in the sphere of the overworked employee, according to Burke and Cooper (2008, p. 75), a state which is deemed to be associated with serious risks.

2.2. Differentiation of closely related terms and concepts

With these basic explanations in mind, the notion of workaholism needs to be elaborated on in greater detail. Moreover, other terms circulating the topic and their link to overwork are briefly discussed in the following subchapters.

2.2.1. Workaholism

The term *workaholism* is widely applied in academic research. Still, there seems to be little consensus about a generally-accepted definition or meaning (Burke, 2006, p. 193; Harpaz & Snir, 2003, p. 291). While several studies have aimed to define the term by combining the most commonly-named characteristics or manifestations, this has proven to be difficult considering its wide-ranging perceptions (Peiperl & Jones, 2001, p. 370). Consequently, as Peiperl and Jones (2001, p. 372) describe it, "the workaholic is to a great extent in the eye of the beholder". Accordingly, the following remarks are to be seen only as an attempt to provide a definition but rather to seek understanding of the term in the context of this thesis.

The notion first appeared through the American professor Wayne E. Oates in 1971, who coined the concept of workaholism, which he described as "the compulsion or the uncontrollable need to work incessantly" (Burke, 2006, pp. 193–194; Oates, 1971, p. 11). As such it is, like the concept of overwork, considered negative by definition. Moreover, scholars seem to equate being in the state of workaholism with other addictions, particularly alcoholism (Burke, 2006, p. 194; Harpaz & Snir, 2003, p. 293). According to Spence and Robbins (1992, p. 160), Oates deliberately altered the word to correspond with the term *alcoholism* when initially coming up with the concept. In explaining his reasoning, Porter (1996, pp. 70–71) states that "whereas an alcoholic neglects other aspects of life for the indulgence in alcohol, the workaholic behaves the same for excessive indulgence in work." Therefore, when viewed from an addiction theory perspective in accordance with the general addiction model,
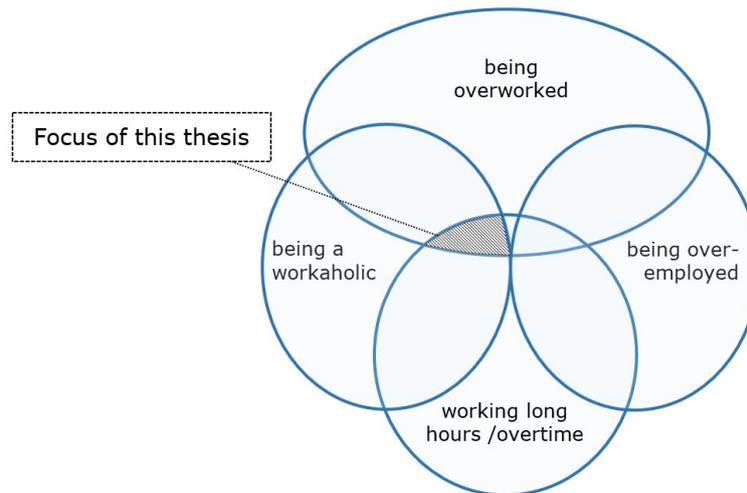
Figure 1: Own visualization of related terms, adapted from the original source. (Source: Burke & Cooper, 2008, p.74)

a workaholic can be described as someone who struggles to control the account of work performed, feels compelled to work beyond what is considered usual or required, and is in most cases also confronted with associated negative consequences. Nevertheless, this definition or line of argumentation is debated, as not all scholars have come to the conclusion that workaholism fulfills the criteria to be equated with the dependency on and abuse of substances (Sussman, 2012, pp. 3, 12).

Conversely, workaholic behavior is not discouraged by all scholars researching the phenomenon, as some find it to be favorable and therefore also view and portray it in positive terms. For instance, authors deem workaholism to be an intrinsic desire or the result of one's love for work or also relate it to positively connotated characteristics such as commitment and organizational citizenship (Burke & Cooper, 2008, p. 17; Harpaz & Snir, 2003, pp. 292–294). Moreover, working overtime typically also increases workers' income and the output levels of organizations or economies, although the latter is rather controversial as, e.g., higher accident rates are to be expected at the workplace (Burke & Cooper, 2008, pp. 66–67). Still, individuals with workaholic tendencies are commonly also referred to as "hyper-performers" by several literature streams (Burke & Cooper, 2008, p. 194). In a similar vein, the research found that some individuals categorized as workaholics have nonetheless expressed high satisfaction with their work situation and/or on a personal level (Peiperl & Jones, 2001, p. 372). Finally, authors also recognize the term as both being negatively and positively connotated insofar as they acknowledge the existence of different workaholic types. A widely-empirically studied example of this approach is the so-called workaholic triad, which uses a total of three dimensions to determine the types of workaholics. Regarding this, the first dimension is *work involvement* (that is, high levels of commitment in terms of effort and time), the second is one's *drive to work* (that is, feeling forced to perform work, triggered by internal pressures), and the third is *work enjoyment* (that is, perceiving work activities as enjoyable or fulfilling). This classification ultimately results in three different types: (a) non-enthusiastic workaholics (high scores in involvement and drive, low scores in enjoyment), (b) enthusiastic workaholics (high scores in all dimensions), (c) work enthusiasts (high scores in involvement and enjoyment, low scores in drive).

The literary interpretation of the latter type, namely work enthusiasts, is consistent with the understanding of work engagement, which is discussed in greater detail further in an upcoming section (Burke, 2006, pp. 194–195).

Based on this line of reasoning, the difference between the terms overwork and workaholism emerges as the former is entirely associated with negative connotations within the literature, while workaholism is not. In consideration of this distinction, most literature in the field seems to, however, be devoted to the topic of workaholism in the negative sense and focuses on its detrimental effects (see, e.g., Oates, 1971; Porter, 1996). Hence, one may argue that this stream of literature is captured through the overlap (see figure 1) between being overworked and being a workaholic, as displayed above. Moreover, there also seems to be a lack of research solely referring to or using the standalone term overwork, while considerable attention is devoted to the concept of workaholism in academic literature (Harpaz & Snir, 2003, p. 292). This again makes it extremely challenging, if not impossible, to draw exclusively on studies that use the term overwork. Moreover, the negative form of workaholism and the concept of overwork as described in this thesis only differ very slightly or not at all, depending on the interpretation of the notion – about which there is still no generally accepted consensus (see e.g. Burke, 2006, p. 193; Harpaz & Snir, 2003, p. 292). Therefore, this Master's thesis aims to focus precisely on the mapped-out overlap between these terms, which is marked as the shaded area in figure 1. In brief terms, this marking captures the most unfavorable state of excessive work attitudes resulting from the interplay between

three of the displayed dimensions. While being overworked should always be viewed in negative terms given its serious risks, working long hours cannot necessarily be presumed as dangerous, only when they begin to involve harmful consequences. The same applies to workaholism, which cannot be viewed only in a negative light, as it could emerge as positive work engagement in disguise. Taking all of these previously outlined literature-based definitions into account, this thesis therefore adopts the following working definition for overwork (see, e.g., Burke, 2006, p. 193; Burke & Cooper, 2008, p. 65; Harpaz & Snir, 2003, p. 292; Oates, 1971, p. 11):

> *Overwork is a compulsive work attitude, leading individuals to work at overcapacity. This type of heavy work investment entails risks or harms and is mostly, but not always, associated with long working hours. When viewed in negative terms, workaholism can be used as an interchangeable term for overwork.*

As a result, the terms overwork, excessive or compulsive work tendencies or attitudes, and workaholism (negative), including further slightly altered terms, will be used interchangeably for this paper. For simplicity reasons, workaholism is therefore not used as an umbrella term for both forms (negative and positive) in this Master's thesis. Instead, work engagement (positive) is treated as a separate concept and is explicitly mentioned when it is used as a basis for argumentations.

2.2.2. Work or job engagement

This subchapter addresses a concept that is closely related to the one explained above. Work engagement is considered a favorable state or condition and resembles the description of positively connoted workaholics, or so-called work enthusiasts. In other words, job engagement can be understood as a beneficial form of workaholism. Engaged employees experience personal satisfaction and feelings of effectiveness when pursuing their work-related goals and are energetic and confident in doing so (Burke, 2006, pp. 195, 213; Mazzetti et al., 2020, pp. 3–4). Similarly, Schaufeli, Salanova, González-romá, and Bakker (2002, pp. 72–74) describe job engagement as a positive state of mind that is typified by vigor, absorption, and dedication and represents the counterpart to a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, namely burnout. According to the authors, job engagement emerges as a permanent cognitive state, leading individuals to perform their work-related tasks with high levels of mental resilience, willingness, and energy. Such individuals are also characterized by persistence when challenges or difficulties arise, as they associate pride, enthusiasm, and high significance with their work tasks and goals. Similar to the addictive nature of workaholism, engaged employees are also struggling to detach themselves from their job. Unlike workaholics, however, they may immerse themselves fully in their work to come close to what Csikszentmihalyi has described as *flow*, a mental state in which intrinsic delight and well-being take a dominant role (1990, as cited in Schaufeli et al.,

2002, pp. 72–75). Thus, individuals with high levels of job engagement are driven to devote great amounts of time to their work because they truly enjoy doing so. In a direct comparison of the two conditions, it becomes clear that this is essentially not the case for workaholics (Sussman, 2012, p. 2). While both workaholics and engaged employees are susceptible to working long hours, the literature shows that job engagement seems to not be accompanied by such an obsession or compulsion as is characteristic of workaholism. Moreover, besides a positive correlation to an employee's well-being, work engagement also has a favorable effect on performance (Burke, 2006, pp. 195, 197, 213). Research on work engagement has sparked significant attention in recent years, particularly in the fields of organizational and occupational psychology as well as human resource management. This can be reasonably explained by the fact that job engagement does not only have a well-documented positive effect on employee health and well-being but also produces desirable outcomes from the employer's perspective, such as increased work motivation or higher performance levels (Stoeber & Damian, 2016, p. 268). Moreover, engaged employees are generally also inclined to stick with an organization for a longer period of time – thus, also fluctuation rates may be significantly lowered through work engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, p. 298).

Therefore, in accordance with Burke's views (2006, p. 195), job or work engagement is viewed as being intrinsically good for those affected in the context of this Master's thesis, while workaholism in broader terms has mostly negative intrinsic effects. This should be taken into account for upcoming sections of this paper.

2.2.3. Heavy work investment and work intensification

Heavy work investment (HWI) can be used as an umbrella term for positive or negative forms of excessive work attitudes. Mazzetti et al. (2020, pp. 1–2), for example, agree with the view of those scholars that classify workaholism as entirely negative, while the authors regard work engagement, as described in detail above, as a positive manifestation of HWI. The term is therefore also understood and used as such in the course of this thesis.

In turn, work intensification describes a fundamentally distinct matter and refers to an "increasing amount of effort an employee must invest during the workday" (Bunner, Prem, & Korunka, 2018, p. 2). The phenomenon stems from economic pressures and changes society faces and extrinsically forces those affected to complete a larger amount of tasks at a higher speed or within a shorter time span (Bunner et al., 2018, p. 2; Cheung, Tang, Lim, & Koh, 2018, p. 2). An increasing workload results in the natural consequence that employees accumulate longer working hours in order to perform their assigned tasks timely and adequately. The authors Cheung et al. (2018, p. 2) therefore view heavy work investment as a product of work intensification.

2.2.4. Long working hours

While long working hours have been briefly discussed previously to establish the link to the overwork phenomenon, it appears reasonable to address the topic again at this point. Given the fact that managerial careers are at the center of attention for this Master's thesis, the connection some authors establish to such types of professions seems noteworthy. For instance, Burke and Cooper (2008, p. 5) suggest that overtime can be viewed as a prerequisite for attaining managerial or leadership positions. Also Johnson and Lipscomb (2006, p. 923) support this claim and postulate that long working hours are increasingly common among professional and managerial workers and people with higher levels of educational training. While the popular perception is that working time is trending to decrease further, the authors speak of a "time divide, mirroring the social class divide" in this regard. That is, high-ranked managerial positions involve longer working hours, while other lower-level positions generally do not. This again explains why a downward trend in the average amount of working hours per week is still logically justifiable (Johnson & Lipscomb, 2006, p. 923).

Moreover, despite the fact that long working hours have been mentioned on several occasions already, what can be classified as such in the first place remains open. In this respect, however, there seems to be no comprehensive conclusion in academic research. Additionally, average working hours per day or week differ between nations. For instance, in their study, Kivimäki, Jokela, and Nyberg (2015, p. 1743) classified work hours to be abnormal and beyond what should be considered standard hours, at 55 hours per week or more. In Austria, per law, eight hours per day and 40 hours per week are considered standard work hours, whereby the working time may be extended up to 60 hours per week or 12 hours per day (AZG, Section 2 §3 and §5).

However, as already indicated by Burke and Cooper (2008, p. 65), long hours alone, while indeed an important factor, are not the only determiner for individuals to find themselves in the unfavorable state of being overworked. In this sense, one must bear in mind that also the positive form of heavy work investment, namely work engagement, is strongly associated with overtime (Mazzetti, Schaufeli, Guglielmi, & Depolo, 2016, p. 886). This understanding is fundamental to this thesis.

2.3. Consequences of overwork

As previously mentioned, workaholic behaviors may result in detrimental effects for those affected, which is where most studies on this phenomenon have devoted their attention (Cheung et al., 2018, p. 2). In fact, they appear to be such an important aspect of the concept as a whole that also, for the definition of the term or the emphasis on the overall relevance of the topic, outcomes are repeatedly addressed in this paper. Hence, although the consequences of overwork are not the focus of the Master's thesis, the most significant outcomes of excessive work attitudes are highlighted again in the following section - not least to address the urgency that this issue necessitates.

Generally speaking, negative outcomes may both arise on an individual level (in nonwork domains) or an organizational level (in the work context). Health-related effects harming the psychological or physical well-being of workaholics themselves appear to be among the most highlighted personal consequences workaholism entails (see, e.g., Burke & Cooper, 2008, pp. 66–67; Endriulaitienė & Morkevičiūtė, 2020, pp. 447–448). More specifically, among many others, health-impairing outcomes include chronic fatigue or stress, emotional exhaustion, sleep disturbance, reduced recovery time, anxiety, a decline in physical and neurocognitive functioning, and low self-esteem. Moreover, overwork may induce burnout syndromes in the longer run (Balducci et al., 2021, p. 8; Burke & Cooper, 2008, pp. 66–67; Mazzetti, Schaufeli, & Guglielmi, 2014, p. 228; Sussman, 2012, p. 4). Galinsky et al. (2005, p. 3) analyzed employees experiencing different levels of overwork (high, medium, low) and found that higher levels of overwork link to more depression symptoms and stress experienced, while highly overworked employees also reported poorer health and tendencies to neglect self-care. Furthermore, as already briefly mentioned in chapter 1.1., the Japanese labor battles the problem of the so-called *karoshi* syndrome – an extremely harmful consequence of overwork - literally translated as "death from overwork". Underlying causes of *karoshi* include suicide, cardiac arrest, heart failure, or strokes. Since these fatal diseases may also be a result of nonwork-related factors, making the syndrome difficult to detect, it can be assumed that official numbers on *karoshi* are substantially lower than they should be (Kanai, 2009, p. 209; Timming, 2020, p. 97). Beyond such detrimental health-related effects, personal consequences also arise as far as social functioning is concerned. In this sense, Sussman (2012, pp. 4–5) summarizes studies on the effects of workaholism, with findings indicating that compulsive work behavior leads to a higher likelihood of conflicts in nonwork domains and also poorer relationships within personal surroundings. Moreover, feelings of frustration or distress are likely to appear once workaholics are forced to detach themselves from their work activities (e.g., when spending time with their family or friends). Thus, overall the personal happiness of those affected may also be impaired, leading to low life and/or career satisfaction (Harpaz & Snir, 2003, p. 292; Sussman, 2012, pp. 4–5).

In addition, effects may also appear in the work context. In contrast to what one might assume, literature links results of overwork on the organizational level generally to poor performance, as workaholics are considered susceptible to higher frequencies of committing errors and hence provoke productivity losses. Similarly, also work-related accidents may increase as a consequence of excessive work (Antosz et al., 2020, p. 1006; Ruhle et al., 2020, p. 344; Sussman, 2012, p. 4). These outcomes strongly relate to potential health-related problems caused by overwork on the personal level, meaning that personal negative effects may spill over to the functioning of an entire organization. In this light, the concept of *presenteeism* appears noteworthy, which describes situations in which individuals attend work although

they are in a poor state of health. Interestingly, the literature suggests that this behavior appears to be widespread across numerous different occupational sectors, while studies indicate that it is especially common among managers (Ruhle et al., 2020, pp. 344, 355). At first, this negative perspective on presenteeism may seem counterintuitive, as organizations may avoid costs associated with the absence of employees at short notice. However, recent studies in the field show the opposite and thereby refer to the above-mentioned effects. At the same time, it should be noted that workaholism and related consequences may also induce *(sickness) absenteeism*, another unfavorable outcome from the perspective of firms. Health incidents may therefore simply interrupt the productive working life of workaholics frequently, which means that organizations may have to deal with an unplanned lack of available staff caused by health-impairing work attitudes (Ruhle et al., 2020, p. 344).

2.4. The causes and antecedents of workaholic behavior

With these possible consequences of overwork in mind, the question remains open as to which causes or antecedents underlie workaholic behavior. Does overwork reflect a deliberate choice by those affected, do these behaviors subconsciously develop in the course of managerial careers, or are such tendencies biologically determined? Similarly, another central question arising in this regard is why such an attitude or behavior triggers negative effects resulting in poor employee well-being for some individuals, while others seem to not face unfavorable consequences despite being confronted with similar demands or despite working equally long hours. This chapter seeks to address these questions.

In fact, workaholic behavior may be a consequence of individual characteristics as well as environmental influences, according to several research streams (see, e.g., Mazzetti et al., 2014, p. 227; Sussman, 2012, pp. 8–10). Building on this, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) is examined and serves as a core concept and fundamental basis for this chapter, as it covers both spheres at the same time: the externally imposed demands of one's job and the externally provided or individually accessible resources of employees. In line with this, additional causes not specifically mentioned in the JD-R model are discussed, some of which constitute so-called job demands or resources, and can therefore be viewed as subcategories in the JD-R model. More specifically, antecedents emerging on the personal level constituting biological or personality-based influences (see, e.g., Schaufeli, 2016) will be assessed. Moreover, situational factors evolving on the organizational level (see, e.g., Mazzetti et al., 2016) are considered. Relating thereto, the social environment inside and outside the organization is examined, in order to assess the role of interpersonal relationships or influences through social settings. This thesis therefore considers particularly three theoretical perspectives collectively, essentially assuming that workaholism develops through certain personality traits on the one hand, while experiences in the social professional or personal environment and constant behavioral reinforcement provide nur-

turing grounds for workaholism on the other (see, e.g., Ng, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2007, p. 123). Altogether, the upcoming sections therefore attempt to uncover all relevant factors stimulating or favoring the appearance of excessive work attitudes. Nevertheless, one should bear in mind that other related aspects, which may also count as antecedents or causes of workaholism, e.g., demographic or cultural influences, are beyond the scope of this thesis.

2.4.1. The Job Demands-Resources model

The subsequent chapter focuses on the Job Demands-Resources model, as originally coined by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004). The model essentially developed out of a growing interest in research to examine the almost exclusively negatively portrayed concept of burnout from a positive perspective, and to establish a closer link to its positive counterpart, namely work engagement (Korunka et al., 2009, p. 243). As part of this Master's thesis, it will be used as the basis explanatory model for the development of excessive work attitudes and their accompanying effects.

The Job Demands-Resources (abbreviated JD-R) model builds on the basic assumption that every occupational setting exerts two types of work characteristics on individuals: job demands and job resources. While *job demands* require effort and skills of physical and/or psychological nature, they are also associated with costs, so that they are often perceived as job stressors. In turn, *job resources* are those aspects linked to a job that assist individuals in achieving their work-related goals, encourage personal growth, and have a diminishing effect on job demands and their cognitive or emotional costs. Such resources can be found on multiple levels – they may originate directly from the organization through factors such as provided opportunities for career advancement or appropriate remuneration. They may also be located at the task level (e.g., autonomy, feedback, skill variety, task significance) or may manifest themselves through work structures (e.g., involvement in decision making, role clarity). Moreover, the authors state that resources may also stem from relationships of individuals to colleagues or coworkers, supervisors, or broader social contexts (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, pp. 312–313). Building on these two general categories, the JD-R model further assumes that two processes have an inducing effect on job motivation and job strain. First, the health-impairment (or energetic) process, which represents the negative side of job demands (e.g., through heavy workload), may lead to an exhaustion of an individual's resources and even to health-related problems as a result (e.g., burnout). In turn, job resources have intrinsic or extrinsic motivational influences on individuals, fostering the positively connoted work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, pp. 313–314; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, pp. 297–298).

Table 1, as shown below, provides an overview, summarizing the most significant characteristics of both dimensions.

The full Job-Demand-Resources Model is displayed further below (figure 2). To make sense of this illustration,

Table 1: Overview of general job demands and job resource characteristics. Own compilation. (Source: Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, pp.312-313)

Job Demands (physical, psychological, social, or organizational job features)	Job Resources (physical, psychological, social, or organizational job features)
- aspects of the job requiring effort or skills - associated with costs - not negative per se - may turn into job stressors (negative, health impairing) - examples include high work pressure, emotionally challenging social interactions, high work intensity	- aspects of the job that support achieving goals, and stimulate growth and development - reduce job demands and associated costs (positive, health-protecting) - may have motivational potential - examples include career opportunities, job security, team climate, role clarity, task significance, feedback

one has to keep the previously mentioned underlying psychological proceedings in mind, which are also referred to as dual processes by the authors. Thus, only when the health-impairing or energetic process prevails, job demands translate into strains and lead employees to be in a state of ill health, with depleted physical and mental resources. In the long run, a breakdown or burnout is likely to result from this (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 313; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, p. 297). These effects therefore resemble the unfavorable state of being overworked in the understanding of this thesis. Mazzetti et al. (2020, p. 13) investigated the role of job demands empirically and found that high job demands are indeed strongly associated with workaholic behavior. In this sense, the authors suggest that workaholism is a dysfunctional strategy to cope with the demand overload experienced by individuals, which leads to a consumption of available psychological resources.

However, when bundled with a sufficient level of resources, job demands may also contain motivational potential, equally to stand-alone job resources. Regardless of how this motivational process may take place, it is ultimately leading to work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, pp. 313–314), a fulfilling state of mind which, as already described in more detail in subchapter 2.2.2, has several favorable effects and also leads to positive outcomes on the organizational level (Korunka et al., 2009, p. 244).

In their work, Bakker and Demerouti (2007, pp. 314–317) appear to focus specifically on job resources and their mitigating or buffering effect on the impact job demands may have on individuals. As previously mentioned, the authors refer to several resources which take on the buffering role against job strain and associated health-damaging consequences, such as social support in the workplace. For instance, recognition, appreciation, or support gained by supervisors or leaders may alleviate the perceived stressors

evoked by demands. In a similar way, this positive impact may also result from interactions with colleagues. In addition to that, resources have great value in their own right (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, pp. 314–317). This proposed buffer effect in the JD-R model and the relationship between job demands, resources, and human well-being has also been empirically investigated by Bakker, Demerouti, and Euwema (2005), with important practical implications observed. Indeed, high job demands combined with low levels of resources available positively influence the occurrence of detrimental effects for an employee, such as exhaustion or burnout - in fact, they do so significantly. More specifically, their study reveals that unfavorable job demands such as work overload, physical and emotional demands did not result in job strain or burnout if specific resources (autonomy, feedback, social support, and positive relationship with supervisors) were present (Bakker et al., 2005, p. 177).

Based on these practical results, a model can be derived that specifically depicts these interaction effects. As displayed in figure 3 below, high levels of job resources in combination with low levels of job demands lead to average job strain and simultaneously trigger high employee motivation. In turn, when resources are low but demands are high, the worst constellation results, namely low motivation and high job strain (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 320).

The upcoming sections take up this line of arguments but focus specifically on why and how job demands are created or emerge in the first place, an aspect that seems to have been largely neglected in the elaborations of the JD-R model. While Bakker and Demerouti's explanatory approach made it clear that the counteracting job resources are found on the level of the organization, on the task level, within an employee's social surroundings, or internally, emitting motivating and positive effects (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, pp. 312–313), a more in-depth on the job demands
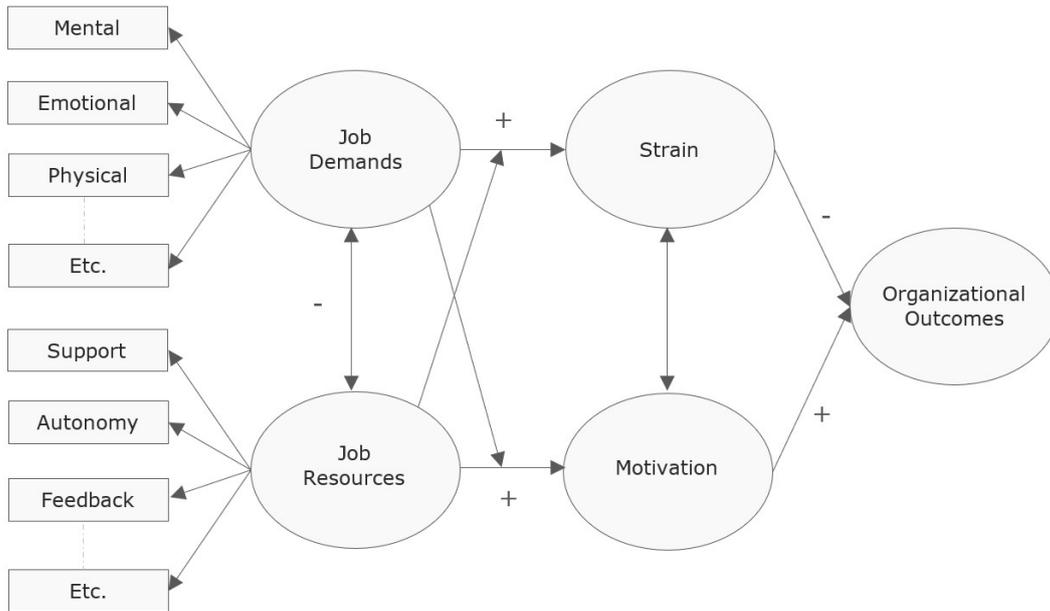
Figure 2: Illustration of the full JD-R model. Own compilation. (Source: Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p.313)

Figure 3: Predictions of the Job Demands-Resources model based on interaction effects. Own compilation. (Source: Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p.320)

side appears reasonable, in order to supplement the model and develop a more integral understanding. Additionally, the following subchapter will take a closer look at how job resources/demands are derived from the unique personality characteristics of employees themselves. Although, according to the model, demands can result in two outcomes (see figure 2), namely strain and motivation, this paper aims to focus primarily on the former. Overall, the theoretical and empirical evidence outlined in the following subchapters can therefore be framed into the Job Demands-Resources model.

2.4.2. Situational factors: The role of overwork climates and social settings

Considering situational factors encouraging overwork, such as organizational ethics, workplace practices, specific job demands, or social interactions, represents an important additional explanatory approach for workaholic behaviors. In the attempt to explain inducements stemming from external factors, this chapter takes a closer look at the construct of *overwork climates* as a first step. Then, closely linked to this, further socio-cultural experiences are discussed. In other words, research consents that a prevailing organizational climate itself or interpersonal relationships in different contexts (workplace vs. personal life) may unintentionally act

as enablers for excessive work attitudes (Liang & Chu, 2009, pp. 653–654; Mazzetti et al., 2014, p. 233, 2020, p. 13; Schaufeli, 2016, p. 105).

Overwork climates

Scholars generally agree that situational factors emerging in the work context, such as specific practices, requirements, ethics, or expectations, represent an important source for or have a reinforcing impact on workaholic behavior (see, e.g., Liang & Chu, 2009, p. 657; Mazzetti et al., 2016, p. 885). Concepts largely addressed in this regard are an organization's culture and climate (see, e.g., Mazzetti et al., 2020; Schaufeli, 2016). While these two theoretical constructs have several overlapping attributes, they nevertheless differ from each other in significant terms. More precisely, organizational culture is viewed as those shared basic assumptions, core beliefs, and values that characterize a given work environment and are passed on to new members of the organization as the correct way to think or feel through socialization experiences and stories. In contrast, an organizational climate is rather focused on the "shared perceptions of and the meaning attached to procedures, practices and policies employees experience" (Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2012, p. 362). This implies observed behaviors and expected or actual reactions to actions of others, for example, in the form of rewards or instrumental support (Schneider et al., 2012, p. 362). James et al. (2008, pp. 15–16) describes the construct in simpler terms as "shared psychological meanings" and suggests that an organizational climate comes into existence only as a result of the aggregation of individual organizational members' own perceptions (climates) of a given work setting. In this sense, the sharing component is crucial. Based on this distinction, Mazzetti et al. (2020, p. 234) suggest that a climate manifests on the surface of an organization's culture, essentially making it perceptible for those affected. It is, therefore, not surprising that many studies seem to predominantly center their research on the origins of an overwork climate rather than culture (Mazzetti et al., 2020, 2014; Schaufeli, 2016) since, according to this understanding, experiences are indeed created through the prevailing organizational culture in the first place. However, the ascribed meaning to these experiences only arises through the perceived climate. Based on this reasoning, this paper will thus also focus on this construct.

In basic terms, the so-called *overwork climate* stands in contrast to an *employee growth climate*, whereby the latter fosters healthy development and professional growth among employees, eventually resulting in work engagement. In this regard, parallels can be drawn to the core assumptions of the JD-R model. Thus, while an *employee growth climate* provides sufficient job resources to employees in the first place but also continuously increases them through certain procedures, policies, or organizational practices, the opposite is the case for an *overwork climate*. Instead, it can be assumed that job resources are lacking or necessarily consumed while pressures are high due to challenging job demands exerted

on organizational members. Hence, this is expected to ultimately lead to workaholism (Schaufeli, 2016, pp. 1060–1061). However, how specifically does this construct encourage excessive work attitudes? In what forms may job demands manifest themselves or appear?

Based on the premise that the average perception of specific *overwork climates* may encourage and sustain workaholic behavior within given work settings, Mazzetti et al. (2016, pp. 881–882) developed an Overwork Climate Scale (OWCS) by clustering the core components of such environments based on a literature review. In essence, the authors incorporate two elements of this specific climate in their measuring scale: (1) The joint perception of a work environment that requires beyond what should be viewed as standard and necessary from an objective standpoint (thus, overwork is collectively perceived as a requirement), and (2) the joint perception that overwork does not need to be restricted or rewarded (thus, no compensation for additional efforts). Contributing particularly to the first aspect is the encouragement of compulsive work conduct through so-called *overwork endorsement* within the workplace. Moreover, the second aspect coming into play is *lacking overwork rewards*. The authors use the latter term to describe the absence of rules and policies within the work context, which compensate for excessive work efforts (Mazzetti et al., 2020, p. 13). In this light, organizational members in managing positions, such as leaders, executives, supervisors, or likewise influential characters, have a major impact. This is plausible as they make decisions about policies or regulations that affect the entire organization but also convey their personal expectations concerning specific work attitudes within such climates. Organizational members may therefore adjust their own views and beliefs related to work according to those of their executives or leaders, which essentially means that specific leadership styles may substantially determine the habits and behavior of employees (Endriulaitienė & Morkevičiūtė, 2020, p. 446). If a workforce collectively shares the perception that these implicit organizational norms and values encourage or reinforce excessive work attitudes, a given organizational setting should be viewed as an overwork climate, in which workaholic members are likely to develop.

Closely linked to this are also perceived necessary work efforts for career advancement or personal success within firms in overwork environments. In this light, *overwork climates* are characterized by the joint observation or perception that long working hours or constant availability are considered an imperative to eventually progress up the career ladder (Mazzetti et al., 2014, p. 234). Some authors, such as Liang and Chu (2009, pp. 653–654), for instance, suggest that labeling excessive work attitudes as exceptional commitments has reassuring effects on such behaviors, particularly in combination with recognition or feedback from supervisors or offered career prospects. However, this claim is not fully supported when it comes to describing *overwork climates*. Rather, as briefly mentioned above, the underlying assumption of the construct is the collective perception that specific rewards are lacking (such as, e.g., supportive

feedback, career opportunities, additional financial remuneration) within such environments. This has been confirmed empirically by several scholars (see, e.g., Van Der Hulst & Geurts, 2010, p. 233) and is furthermore consistent with the JD-R model in a sense that such rewards are simultaneously resources a company may provide to its workforce (Mazzetti et al., 2016, p. 881). Therefore, this reasoning also links to the previously established understanding of the buffering effects job resources have on the potential harmful consequences of high job demands. Thus, if such resources are high, high motivation effects occur, whereas job strain is either low or average, depending on the specific influencing job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 320) (view figure 3 for further clarification). In simpler terms, the conclusion can be drawn that *overwork climates* are collectively perceived as low-reward (low-resources) work settings. Moreover, the role of leaders and their influence on organizational climates is not weighed down with negative connotations entirely. For instance, in the light of the JD-R model, certain leadership styles may play both demanding and resourcing roles in the context of overwork (Endriulaitienė & Morkevičiūtė, 2020, p. 450). Referring to this, Burke (2001, p. 643) suggest that managers can take on assisting roles in supporting employees to change workaholic attitudes, while they may likewise contribute to the establishment of *employee growth climates* within an organization – and thereby stimulate work engagement among organizational members (Mazzetti et al., 2020, p. 14).

On the other hand, *overwork climates* also often incorporate competitive spirits among employees. In order to positively stand out not only through performance but through visible commitment, competitive atmospheres cause individuals to show up especially early and/or to leave their workplace extremely late, which naturally evokes workaholic behaviors, including its consequences in the long run (Ng et al., 2007, p. 125). When such habits are adopted collectively and perceived as implicit norms, this may therefore likewise contribute to *overwork endorsement*, as previously outlined.

Social settings

Major explanatory power is attributed to social and cultural experiences not only made within particular organizational settings but also through interpersonal relationships within the personal surroundings of those affected. In essence, these variables seem to positively impact workaholic tendencies through social learning or modeling, or through being educated about appropriate work ethics within certain settings (Mazzetti et al., 2014, p. 233; Sussman, 2012, p. 9). This follows the understanding of various theories of social systems, which postulate that workaholism positively relates to reinforcing encounters made within two distinct systems: family/friends and the workplace (Burke & Cooper, 2008, p. 102). However, as far as organizational overwork inducements through socio-cultural experiences are concerned, one should bear in mind that these aspects closely intermingle with the earlier discussed notion of an *overwork climate*.

Considering personal relationships, a large variety of negative events could possibly contribute to excessive work attitudes. One particularly popular explanatory approach focuses on learning effects through observation, producing mirrored behavior. According to this, workaholics may develop as a result of workaholic family members or other important role models leading by example. Similarly, these arguments may also be applied to the work context – as observed workaholic behavior of certain influential individuals within an organizational environment, for instance, supervisors, colleagues or mentors, triggers effects likewise (Ng et al., 2007, p. 125; Sussman, 2012, p. 9). An additional explanatory approach regards the tendency to work long hours as a partly conscious decision in order to prevent oneself from having to engage in social communities. In this regard, Ng et al. (2007, p. 124) argue that devoting large amounts of time to one's work could be viewed as a socially accepted strategy to avoid spending time with family and friends. Indeed, the literature finds that work-related excuses to avoid participation in a social context are generally considered legitimate (Ng et al., 2007, p. 124). In this respect, Berglas (2004, as cited by Ng et al., 2007, p. 124) stresses that one strong cause for workaholic behavior could be that affected employees experience difficulties having close relationships with others or are simply not willing to establish them. Moreover, from the perspective of family systems theory, workaholic behavior is mainly fostered and encouraged through unhealthy dynamics within family settings (Burke & Cooper, 2008, p. 105). However, such influencing factors are too diverse to be further elaborated on in the context of this thesis. Generally, arguments in this regard seem to mainly focus on individual circumstances beyond the scope of the workplace or on single influences acting as self-imposed references.

Arguably, these factors may exert substantial influence on workaholic attitudes; however, organizational climates fostering overwork, as previously addressed, appear to be of more significance for the purpose of this Master's thesis. This becomes apparent in the attempt to derive recommendations for actions, as one could assume that factors emerging on this level are easier to influence or change. Referring to this, Mazzetti et al. (2020, p. 14), for instance, suggest that efforts should be made to create work environments that discourage workaholic behaviors or compulsive work attitudes by specifically modifying situational factors such as high job demands or the organizational climate, particularly rewards or resources it comprises. Still, research efforts appear to be extremely large when it comes to individual factors, specifically originating from the personality of workaholics. The next section therefore gets to the bottom of this, to find out whether certain individuals are simply more prone than others to develop into workaholics and/or are more likely to suffer from the consequences of being overworked.

2.4.3. Individual factors: The role of personality traits, values, and gender differences

Workaholic tendencies are further conditioned by individual factors. One common explanatory approach for this

behavior links to trait theory and essentially assumes that certain personality characteristics act as a predisposition or major source for excessive work attitudes (Mazzetti et al., 2020, p. 2; Schaufeli, 2016, p. 1057). Personality traits are generally defined as stable behavioral or cognitive patterns, which drive individuals toward certain actions (Liang & Chu, 2009, p. 650).

To assess whether heavy work investment is associated with specific traits, scholars often employ the *Big Five personality model*, as developed by McCrae and John (1992). The model essentially captures an individual's personality based on five different dimensions or factors: extraversion, conscientiousness, neuroticism, openness to experience, and agreeableness (McCrae & John, 1992, p. 175). In essence, *extraversion* translates into high levels of assertiveness, ambition, and energy, while *conscientiousness* leads individuals to be persistent and organized. *Neuroticism* goes hand in hand with emotional insecurity or instability, making those affected prone to depression and stress. Lastly, high levels of *openness* describe sensitive, intellectual, curious, or imaginative personalities, and *agreeableness* refers to the dimension leading individuals to be cooperative, caring, and perceived as likable (Schaufeli, 2016, p. 1058). In the attempt to find one generally valid link between workaholism and the mentioned personality traits of the Big Five, Schaufeli (2016, pp. 1059–1060) summarizes the most central findings of studies dedicated to this topic, all of which were conducted between 2006 and 2015. While findings of research seem to vary slightly between the scrutinized research papers, a general observation is that *neuroticism* is positively associated with the negative psychological state of workaholism. In turn, a negative association between this dimension and its positive antipode work engagement becomes visible. The author verifies this relationship also in his own work and additionally finds a (weaker) positive correlation between the two dimensions of *agreeableness* and *extraversion*. On the contrary, work engagement correlates positively with three traits of the Big Five, namely *openness, conscientiousness*, and *agreeableness*. Based on these results, particularly referring to the positive relation between *neuroticism* and workaholism, the undesirable aspects of the phenomenon are once again underpinned when considering the dimension's negatively connotated definition. On top of that, workaholics are found to have an extrovert character, and rather high levels of *agreeableness* seem to prevail – whereas the latter may appear surprising at first glance. However, this personality trait also involves norm conformity originating from desired social approval (Schaufeli, 2016, pp. 1063–1066). In this respect, the author (2016, p. 1066) hypothesizes that since workaholics score high on agreeableness, they are simultaneously more likely to comply with imposed norms or rules, and attach considerable importance to doing so, which may result in heavy work investment in order to satisfy this self-imposed standard.

By contrast, Mazzetti et al. (2020, pp. 3, 10–11) criticize that studies on personality factors are often entirely limited to the Big Five model. In response to this, the authors add to the results of previous research and name *obsessive-compulsive traits*, such as rigidity, superego, and orderliness, as further characteristics that stimulate or drive the development of workaholic behaviors. Such traits are specifically causing the inability of individuals to disengage from their work activities or lead employees to experience a state of anxiety when they do not actively work. In addition, their research indicates that also *perfectionism* and *fear of failure* constitute personality traits that positively correlate with workaholism. These characteristics translate into specific personal beliefs, which often take on an irrational or extreme form. In this light, workaholics impose enormously high standards on themselves and are also overly concerned about how they are judged by others within their social settings. Therefore, those affected are driven to deliver high performance and admirable achievements. With this in mind, the authors highlight a crucial distinction to be made in this context: Workaholic individuals do not overwork out of intrinsic motivation but are rather driven to do so by the urge to apply strategies to counteract their fear of being perceived as a failure. Heavy work investment is therefore triggered and may be viewed as inevitable in certain situations by workaholic employees (Mazzetti et al., 2020, pp. 10–12).

In a similar vein, Ng et al. (2007, p. 123) suggest that especially *achievement-related personality traits* and *work values* act as predispositions for workaholic behavior. Besides an obsessive-compulsive personality, the scholars further state that individuals with Type A personalities, who are believed to be ambition-seeking, achievement-striving and impatient, are prone to develop excessive work attitudes. Similarly, the authors also propose a positive correlation between workaholism, and the trait *need for achievement*. While such personality factors represent noteworthy antecedents, also internalized values and beliefs contribute to such behaviors. Indeed, from an empirical perspective, personality traits and values are closely related constructs, however, there is an important theoretical distinction to be made. Values are not fully genetically conditioned, but also slowly develop through experiences within social settings. Achievement-related values may therefore be partially acquired through socialization processes and also have a stimulating effect on individuals in this regard (Ng et al., 2007, pp. 123–124). Indeed, achievement orientation encourages employees to spend long hours at their workplace and leads them to work beyond what is financially or contractually required, according to Liang and Chu (2009, p. 651). Moreover, another concept that links to workaholism, albeit not only to its negative form, is *narcissism*. Narcissistic personalities comprise the urge to succeed in the professional work context, whereby this links to the strong desire to achieve power over, and admiration by others. In this sense, workaholic behavior may therefore also arise in the attempt to place one's own abilities above those of others, for instance, in direct comparison to colleagues (Falco et al., 2020, pp. 2, 18).

Another essential aspect that should briefly be addressed in this chapter is whether one gender is more likely to develop workaholic tendencies than another or, more importantly, is

more severely affected by the negative impact overwork entails. Interestingly, the separate consideration of these two aspects is crucial, as long working hours do not necessarily translate into the feeling of being overworked and vice versa (Burke & Cooper, 2008, p. 65) (view chapter 2.1). This is also clearly shown through empirical results of studies that look at gender differences. For instance, a study investigating the American workforce (Galinsky et al., 2005, p. 6) shows that men generally work longer hours, show higher accessibility rates outside normal working hours, and are more likely to be occupied in positions associated with job attributes that seem to positively contribute to overwork. However, despite these observations, women are found to be more overworked than male workers. While this may appear rather counterintuitive at first, female employees reported a higher necessity for multi-tasking in their positions, which the authors name as a likely explanation for their findings (Galinsky et al., 2005, p. 6). Earlier research dedicated to gender differences by Burke (2000, p. 10) indicates that similar findings were found in previous studies. For instance, study results show that women tend to devote less time to work-related activities and also do not work overtime hours as frequently but still report higher levels of exhaustion and stress caused by their jobs. Sussman (2012, p. 9) summarizes further findings of studies supporting these claims. Moreover, women can also be associated with higher levels of perfectionism when compared to male employees (Burke, 2000, p. 11). To some extent, gender can therefore be understood as a biological inducement to overwork.

Nevertheless, the discussion on gender differences cannot be entirely reduced to biological factors since also the personal context and related socially imposed norms and expectations are likely to be very different for working men and women. In this light, Cha (2013, p. 158) stresses that prevailing traditional gender roles structurally complicate the possibilities for women, particularly mothers, to work overtime in the first place. While an imposed standard of long working hours seems to be gender-neutral at first glance, it must be considered that family-related obligations or matters generally still limit the time resources of mothers much more significantly than those of fathers. In fact, statistics show that even when women earn higher incomes than their male partners, they spend more time with their children when compared to fathers. In addition, also daily childcare duties and decisions regarding a child's upbringing are tasks still predominantly carried out by mothers despite their increased time spent in the workforce (Cha, 2013, p. 161). Moreover, this problem seems to be firmly anchored in social structures, as challenges persist even when mothers receive sufficient support from the child's father and their careers are steep and successful. Relating thereto, studies show that mothers succeeding in their careers are perceived as less friendly or colder when compared to men with similar circumstances and success. Moreover, women with children are more likely to experience feelings of guilt and psychological stress when they have to prioritize work over family matters, in contrast to the male parent (Cha, 2013, p. 162). In the profes-

sional context, norms and expectations regarding overtime hours therefore commonly imply a lack of opportunities for career advancement or promotions for women, especially in work environments or settings that value considerably high time commitment from their employees. The studied occupational field for this thesis, namely management, appears to presuppose incredibly high norms as far as long working hours are concerned and also penalizes the deviation from this standard, according to several studies (Cha, 2013, pp. 159–160). In this context, links can again be drawn to the theoretical core construct of this work, the JD-R model. Interestingly, the model names opportunities for career advancement and promotion, often lacking especially for women, as resources, which have a buffering effect against the negative consequences of excessive work practices (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, pp. 312–313). One may therefore assume that the structural absence of such resources has not only a negative effect on employee motivation but also reinforces or at least does not alleviate job strain.

In summary, the previous review of the literature clearly demonstrates that individual factors such as personality traits, values, and gender, promote excessive work attitudes. However, while they do have a reinforcing or contributory character, these dimensions alone do not provide sufficient explanatory power. Instead, it appears to be the interplay between individual personality characteristics and particular inducements existing in organizational environments, such as *overwork climates*, and other social settings, which collectively contribute to the development of overwork behaviors. Overall, these factors can be framed into the outlined Job Demands-Resources model (as demands or resources, respectively) and therefore enrichen the model-based arguments of Bakker and Demerouti (2007).

2.5. The glamorization of overwork

As previously mentioned, this thesis aims to shed light on why the romanticizing of heavy work investment occurs. However, research devoted specifically to this aspect, herewith referred to as the glamorization of overwork, seems to be lacking. Nonetheless, overwork is the subject of numerous articles and blog posts apart from scientific or academic spheres, often sparked by discussions on social media platforms such as LinkedIn. In essence, the question raised is why overwork is often normalized or considered a prerequisite for succeeding in a work context and, more importantly, why related consequences are portrayed as "markers of success" or "badges of honor" (see, e.g., Leeson, 2020; Lufkin, 2021).

Of course, also the previously discussed causes of overwork may be closely intertwined with the reasons behind the glamorization of overwork. In other words, specific *overwork climates*, likely leading to the adoption of certain work-related values, attitudes, or behavior, as well as interpersonal relationships in social settings in the work context or nonwork domain, can likewise be assumed to not only stand as a cause for the development of workaholics but also encourage

individuals to glamorize such behavior. The same is applicable to particular personality traits or characteristics closely related to workaholism, as discussed in chapter 2.3.

Beyond these discussed aspects, however, this Master's thesis aims to establish novel explanatory approaches as far as the glamorization of excessive work behaviors is concerned. For this purpose, two specific research areas will be considered: work engagement and the concept of the *triumph of emptiness*. While contradictory forms of heavy work investment exist, most of which manifest themselves negatively, there is a growing interest in research to study the concept of work engagement, a positively connoted work attitude, likewise causing individuals to devote significant effort and time to their work (Korunka et al., 2009, p. 244; Mazzetti et al., 2020, p. 11). The more precise investigation of this phenomenon and its distinction to unhealthy work practices appears relevant for this Master's thesis, as an outside perspective may assume that heavy work investment from engaged employees may be wrongly perceived as the glamorization of overwork, particularly when prevailing job resources needed to cope with high job demands are not taken into consideration. The fundamental ideas of Alvesson's (2013) *triumph of emptiness* are closely examined to address the question of why glamorization may occur, meaning the act of exaggerating positive connotations with one's detrimental work attitudes in this specific case. This is therefore very different from the reasoning behind the first theoretical explanatory approach, work engagement, which essentially assumes that glamorization occurs because overwork does not affect the individual in a negative sense. Instead, in the context of this Master's thesis, the elaboration of Alvesson's concepts (2013) is built on the assumption that behavior inside and outside of the workplace is wrongly presented in a positive light although it actually entails negative effects.

2.5.1. Using work engagement as an explanatory approach

In a first attempt to explain the glamorization of overwork, the notion of work engagement is considered. As already set out in Chapter 2.2.2, for the purpose of clearly distinguishing the term from its negatively connoted counterpart, this means that engaged employees are considered to be in a positive, energetic work-related state of mind, which relates to high levels of dedication, absorption, and vigor. In this sense, they appear to be enthusiastic about their jobs and proud of their positions and occupational activities (Burke, 2006, p. 195; Mazzetti et al., 2020, pp. 1–2). Schaufeli et al. (2002, p. 74) describes the term work engagement as the reverse phenomenon of burnout, where the latter is described to be strongly related to low levels of activation (thus, exhaustion) and low identification (thus, cynicism). The opposite is the case for engaged individuals.

It is important to bear in mind that work engagement also manifests itself through long working hours or overtime. One of the three dimensions of the construct is representative of this, namely absorption (Korunka et al., 2009, p. 244). This means that engaged employees are typically extremely fo-

cused on their tasks and often seem to immerse themselves so deeply in their projects that they lose track of the actual time spent at work. What is profoundly different in comparison to the negative aspects of workaholism is, however, that health-impairing effects do not exist for work engagement, and also the motivation behind this work behavior is not the same. Moreover, equally to workaholics, literature agrees that engaged employees also tend to experience trouble in mentally detaching themselves from their work-related activities. Whereas workaholics are obsessed and compulsive and generally do not perceive their high job involvement in positive terms, engaged employees are characterized by enjoyment and passion for their jobs (Burke, 2006, pp. 197–200; Korunka et al., 2009, p. 244; Sussman, 2012, p. 2).

Thus, based on this general understanding of work engagement, its glamorization seems obvious. Since it is a positive phenomenon, which even evokes pride in individuals, one may therefore argue that engaged workers are consequently entitled to glamorize it, as literature also presents it as a behavior that can be applauded. Moreover, another assumption in this context relates to social settings, specifically related to the fact that literature agrees that excessive work, in terms of overtime or long hours, may also occur under the guise of work engagement. As already mentioned in previous sections, workaholic behavior can affect social relationships negatively, partially due to constant absences when it comes to social gatherings, e.g., among family and friends (Sussman, 2012, pp. 4–5). Arguably, the same could apply to engaged employees. The consequence of this could ultimately be that work engagement is not perceived as positive or applaudable in such social environments but instead becomes primarily apparent through subjective side effects, such as an increased absence of those concerned. If an engaged worker nevertheless portrays his/her work behavior in positive terms, it may be mistakenly confused with the glamorization of overwork.

Assumptions in this regard could similarly be applied to co-workers. For instance, Korunka et al. (2009, p. 244) stresses that engaged employees are provided with sufficient resources to not only deal with job demands but also to personally develop and grow. Such demands and resources, as also intensively discussed earlier on, are mostly person-related, such as high levels of task significance or feedback (= resources) or high perceived work pressures or challenging tasks (= demands) (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, pp. 312–313). Therefore, it also seems plausible that these individual aspects are not known by each and every co-worker. At the same time, it was previously outlined that the behavior of organizational members, especially of those who are viewed as role models or who work in high-ranking positions, e.g., executives or supervisors, is often imitated or mirrored by others. Relating to this, the difference between negative forms of heavy work investment and work engagement might not be fully understood by colleagues, especially if individual job resources are not known or considered. Thus, one could argue that also in the work context, the glamorization of work engagement may be confused with that of overwork, only if the

tendency to work excessively but not the available demand-resource balance for such employees is judged. If this is the case, one may further argue that workaholic tendencies could possibly also develop as a result of the observation of engaged workers, when their excessive work behavior is misinterpreted.

Overall, these assumed relationships can be summarized as follows: from an external perspective, one could wrongly assume, both in personal and professional spheres, that work engagement actually represents overwork. Due to observed long working hours, significant amounts of overtime, and the failure to fully detach oneself from work – all of which are elements associated with both positive and negative forms of heavy work investment – one could come to this conclusion. While the glamorization of work engagement is not negative per se, it could trigger negative effects when it is mistaken for overwork. Thus, if such confusions occur, the wrong construct is perceived as being portrayed in a positive light, such as workaholism in negative terms.

2.5.2. Linking glamorization to the triumph of emptiness

Linking the glamorization of overwork to the concept of the *triumph of emptiness* (Alvesson, 2013) represents the second attempt to explain underlying reasons for falsely portraying unhealthy work behavior as usual behavior, normal efforts or indicators for success to the outside world. Using the ideas behind this theoretical concept, this chapter aims to solve the question of why individuals would possibly glamorize workaholic behavior, given the damaging effects they may cause on themselves and their surroundings. In very basic terms, Alvesson refers to three contemporary elements, namely *grandiosity*, *illusion tricks*, and *zero-sum games*, characterizing the advanced modern society we live in today, according to the author. These manifestations can be viewed independently from each other but simultaneously as trends in contemporary development that continuously reinforce each other (Alvesson, 2013, p. 21).

With *grandiosity* being the central condition or phenomenon, he argues that individuals constantly put in the effort to add attractiveness to occurrences related to them in order to improve their own self-esteem and perceived status, while no actual substance, quality, or viability is truly behind this. In doing so, they strongly focus on their visuals, jargon, and presentation in mass media. Alvesson argues that the underlying reasons for this urge to achieve *grandiosity* lie in the advanced society itself. Hence, it can be understood as a collective phenomenon. Amplifying effects originate therefore also from organizations and professional institutions in occupational sectors. Essentially, our modern society is typified by an accumulation of processes, structures, or mechanisms, all of which strongly foster *grandiosity* (Alvesson, 2013, pp. 1–15, 21). Related to this central understanding, *zero-sum games* emerge as a second manifestation. The construct basically refers to the assumption that benefits are always gained at the disadvantage of others. Therefore, also competition comes into play, as perceived personal satisfaction is deeply intermingled with that of other individuals. This again means

that success is primarily recognized as such when it appears to be superior in relation to the achievements of others. To illustrate his reasoning behind this manifestation, Alvesson (2013, p. 4) gives an example related to car ownership: driving an old, valueless vehicle does not constitute a significant problem for most individuals, unless the surrounding majority of the population makes the transition to modern, luxury cars. In most cases, aside from the small minority which enjoys deviating from the new normality, those individuals driving through such surroundings in their old cars generally feel dissatisfied with their own circumstances in this regard (Alvesson, 2013, pp. 4–5). Finally, *illusion tricks* represent a third core manifestation, which represents the increasing interest in conveying positive impressions or imagery. Indeed, this construct is closely interconnected with *grandiosity* as both manifestations seek to present events or circumstances in a positive or glamorous light. The difference between these two is, however, that *grandiosity* basically refers to general attempts to portray certain elements or occurrences as greater than what they actually are (within a reasonable framework). *Illusion tricks*, on the other hand, essentially establish misleading or false relationships to certain behaviors or competencies. In doing so, they do not necessarily anticipate strong connotations with success or attractiveness. Instead, they may simply produce delusive effects in order to fulfill certain expectations or to comply with social norms. For instance, companies could use *illusion tricks* to falsely inflate the perceived competencies of employees by changing their job descriptions or titles, while the work tasks they perform remain largely unchanged. Moreover, what appears particularly striking in this context is that individuals who employ such illusionary practices do not only deceive others but also engage in self-deception (Alvesson, 2013, p. 18).

In essence, the *triumph of emptiness* is therefore considered a core component in today's society and results from the interplay between the described manifestations. According to the author, most organizations employ or include each of the described constructs in organizational structures, causing such behavior to intensify further. As a result, a vicious cycle takes shape, giving rise to the increasing emphasis of insubstantial branding and self-personifications over substantive concerns. Thus, behind these seemingly remarkable facades, deceptive maneuvers hide, which conceal, according to Alvesson, the *triumph of emptiness* (Alvesson, 2013, pp. 2–3, 224–225).

Now that the basic assumptions behind Alvesson's construct are mapped out, this Master's thesis aims to establish a link to overwork and its glamorization. At this point, it is again crucial to emphasize that one should bear in mind that the presented arguments are novel theoretical links, none of which have essentially been established by Alvesson himself, at least not in this specific form. Therefore, the following section is based on conjectures drawn from the linkage between earlier-debated literature-built arguments and central elements of the *triumph of emptiness*.

In the attempt to achieve *grandiosity*, workaholics may seek to give their own brand, meaning themselves in a busi-

ness context, status-enhancing images, regardless of the negative consequences they might experience as a result of their work behavior. According to Alvesson (2013, pp. 8–9), in aiming toward *grandiosity*, individuals do not go beyond what appears reasonable or strive toward completely delusionary undertakings. Instead, *grandiosity* is somewhat socially legitimatized or embraced and may therefore appear in disguise without being obviously misleading. In this sense, also excessive work and overtime are generally rather viewed as a legitimate activity, although this naturally lies in the eye of the beholder. For example, if workaholics do not participate in social life, society commonly views work-related absence as a reasonable excuse (Ng et al., 2007, p. 124). Taking this as a starting point, one may therefore argue that the glamorization of overwork through *grandiosity* is essentially not restricted or constrained but on the contrary, considered to be legitimate.

Moreover, another link can be established to Alvesson's understanding of the advanced society as a whole – in which the concept of *the triumph of emptiness* supposedly flourishes. Similarly, chapter 2.3.2 gave theoretical insights arguing that interpersonal relationships in social settings may influence the development of excessive work attitudes. Comparably to this, Alvesson (2013, p. 4) describes that in the context of *zero-sum games*, success and what is generally perceived as desirable for an individual is measured in relation to the achievements of others (hence, the collectivity). Based on this reasoning, one may assume that workaholics align not only their work behavior with the behavior of others but that such learning or mirroring effects may also be applicable when it comes to the glamorization of workaholic tendencies. In other words, the social settings employees are exposed to appear to be incredibly significant. In this context, Alvesson (2013, pp. 1, 28, 199) also mentions that in professional spheres, people constantly try to impress and ensure to be recognized as competent and successful by others, which is further intensified in competitive environments. As an example of this, he names boosted CVs, commonly equipped with numerous *illusion tricks* such as inflated job titles or grades. In this regard, one could continue the train of thought one step further and consider the role of online social networks. However, the influence of social media networks in this regard must be clarified by means of empirical research.

On a further note, parallels can also be drawn to certain consequences and antecedents of excessive work attitudes recognized by literature, as already discussed in previous chapters. Interestingly, *grandiosity* is associated with high levels of narcissism and the longing to improve one's self-worth or self-esteem (Alvesson, 2013, pp. 8–9). On the one hand, low self-esteem is acknowledged as an effect workaholism may entail (Sussman, 2012, p. 10), whereas, on the other hand, studies also find that narcissism is positively associated with workaholism and its positive antipode work engagement (Falco et al., 2020, p. 18). One may therefore argue that one possible explanation for the *glamorization of overwork* is that individuals with higher levels of narcissism are not only prone to engage in workaholic behavior but to

also portray it in positive terms in order to gain more confidence about themselves.

Summing up, using Alvesson's theoretical constructs, this chapter attempts to explain why overwork is publicly misrepresented as such that does not link to negative effects. However, it remains questionable whether the considerations and assumptions put forward in connection with *grandiosity, zero-sum games,* and *illusion tricks* are truly manifested in practice. Clarifying this is therefore one objective of the empirical research conducted for this Master's thesis.

3. Methodology

In addition to the illustrated theoretical perspectives this paper scrutinizes, the findings of this thesis will be enhanced with empirical research. This is considered crucial in order to assess whether theoretical findings can also be applied to the chosen subject sample and, overall, to accurately investigate perceptions of individuals in the pursuit of managerial careers.

Thereby, it is the aim of the empirical research to provide evidence of the causes of overwork and potential triggers for the glamorization of heavy work investment toward others. As theoretical developments on the origins or antecedents of workaholic behavior are still lacking (Burke & Cooper, 2008, p. 61; Douglas & Morris, 2006, p. 394), particularly in specific areas such as the socio-cultural context of those concerned (Mazzetti et al., 2020, p. 13), a closer investigation appears much needed. Moreover, the research interest in the glamorization of such overwork behaviors remains virtually unaddressed in the present literature, making theoretical contributions here particularly valuable.

On the basis of the stated research question (see chapter 1.2) and theoretical considerations, the following subchapters justify and outline the applied research design for the empirical approach of this Master's thesis in the following subchapter. Next, the data collection process is presented in section 3.2, and the sampling method and research context are described in 3.3. This includes a brief description of the interview guideline and also sheds light on the overall procedure, communication with potential interview partners, and the subsequent transcription. Finally, the analysis of data, according to Kuckartz (2018), is explained in detail in 3.4, while the proceeding is reflected with regard to quality criteria in subchapter 3.5.

3.1. Research design

The outline of the chosen research design for this Master's thesis is viewed as critical, as it helps to plan essential steps, allocate relevant resources throughout the course of the study and finally, also legitimize the overall research process (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2019, p. 106). In very basic terms, different methods of empirical research – whether they are of qualitative or quantitative nature - encompass the methodological guidelines used to establish links between existing theoretical literature and collected data, and further

guide the analytical process. Considering this, it becomes apparent that decisions on the appropriate research technique cannot be detached from the elaborated theory-based information demands (Baur & Blasius, 2019, pp. 1–3).

A qualitative approach will be used for this Master's thesis, in consideration of its basic theoretical frameworks, proposed research question, and the variety of methods available for empirical investigations. Qualitative research aims to achieve in-depth interpretations of specific subjects by taking their individual perspectives and personal attitudes, views, experiences and/or perceptions into account (Albers, Klapper, Konradt, Walter, & Wolf, 2009, p. 6; Aspers & Corte, 2019, pp. 146–147). In contrast to this, quantitative techniques would not produce desired or meaningful results for the present study, not least because they center on measurements, quantities, and numerical values and are thereby primarily concerned with the testing of predefined hypotheses within large, representative samples (Albers et al., 2009, pp. 6–7). As this Master's thesis seeks to understand different causes of excessive work behaviors, the underlying reasons and motives linked to specific work-related attitudes, and the impact such behaviors may have within different social settings; a qualitative approach best suits this exploration.

While the qualitative spectrum of methods is broad and offers wide-ranging possibilities as far as the data collection is concerned, this Master's thesis will use open interviews (see, e.g., Baur & Blasius, 2019, p. 15) as a suitable qualitative approach, as interviews will allow a "deep dive" into motivations and perceptions of overwork. The following chapter will explore the collection of data in greater detail.

3.2. Collection of data

This subchapter briefly explains how valid and reliable data was collected. Referring to the stated research question, the antecedents or causes for overwork potentially triggering its glamorization in the longer run, were empirically explored with qualitative, semi-structured interviews, using a prepared interview guide in order to steer the conversation in the desired direction. This form of conducting an interview enables a structured proceeding and therefore allows the interviewer to tackle all relevant topics (Helfferich, 2019, pp. 669, 675). In this context, a mixture of open questions and narrative-requesting techniques were used although the interviewer addressed further aspects flexibly, depending on the respective course of the conversation. This proceeding therefore contrasts with other more open and spontaneous qualitative interview techniques, such as, for example, narrative, monologic interviews or ethnographic interviews, both of which typically work without a guideline (Helfferich, 2019, p. 671). Generally speaking, arguments favoring and opposing more rigid structuring of an interview situation exist. For instance, Helfferich (2019, p. 676) recommends avoiding triggering the subject repeating the posed question as this could strongly limit the respondents' subjective perception. On the other hand, she also emphasizes that a given structure ensures content relevance throughout the

conversation, which may facilitate the comparability of results in the data analysis process.

The interview guideline developed for this Master's thesis consisted of three separate content blocks, with a total of 17 core questions. Before shifting to the discussion of them, the guideline provided a declaration of consent. Moreover, socio-demographic characteristics were recorded. The latter is not included in the transcripts, as this type of personal data was treated confidential and only documented as potential indices for data interpretation purposes. The first content module was essentially aimed at attuning the interviewees to their daily experienced work setting and environment. This was achieved through narrative-prompting questions related to their current job situation. Following the Job Demands-Resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), the second content block then explored prevailing job demands and resources impacting respondents, and further scrutinized, whether the working environments of the interviewees bear a resemblance to so-called *overwork climates,* as coined by Mazzetti et al. (2016). The last section of the interview guideline identified perceptions regarding the glamorization of overwork in both the private and professional work contexts of respondents. The full guideline, including all posed questions, can be found in the appendix B.

3.3. Sampling and research context

This subchapter briefly explains how the choice of suitable interview partners took place within a given research context and in what way the sample was accessed. Given the aims of this study, convenience sampling was used for this paper. Nevertheless, the sample was based on a criterion-guided pre-selection strategy since considerations had to be made as to who could serve as a starting point for the empirical research. In this sense, the selection of the sample based on socio-demographic characteristics was deemed appropriate (see, e.g., Albers et al., 2009, p. 321), with the level of education and actual or intended economic professional orientation displaying the most important criteria.

Therefore, the following aspects were predefined as general requirements and applied to the sample: All respondents have obtained at least a Bachelor's degree in business or related fields. As far as their working activity is concerned, respondents were either occupied as full-time employees in managerial careers (min. 38,5h/week by contract) or – in the case that they were still actively enrolled in an academic study, such as a Master's program geared towards management, devoted at least 25h/week (by contract) to their job. Although it was not the focus of the empirical investigation to analyze variations between different socio-demographic groups, a balance concerning gender and career stage (full-time employees vs. working students) was nevertheless intentionally achieved. The primary pre-selection criterion, however, was the respondent's personal perception of his/her own overwork tendencies and the presence of at least some sort of workaholic behavior. This was determined prior to the interviews, as described in more detail further below, by

a preliminary analysis using a scale for workaholism (Schneider & Bühler, 2004).

The study took place in Vienna, Austria. Between February and March 2022, a total of 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted - mostly virtually via Microsoft Teams as a result of the COVID-pandemic. The interview duration was between 47 and 65 minutes. All interviews were conducted in German (the native language of the interviewer and all interviewees), were recorded and transcribed verbatim, directly with the software MAXQDA, but altered into grammatically correct standard German. Dialects and punctuations were thereby adjusted accordingly, while longer pauses for reflection were included as such. This study thereby closely followed instructions and transcription rules suggested by Rädiker and Kuckartz (2019, pp. 1–4). The sample included five women and five men, with an average age of 32.3 years. As for the professional activity of respondents, six interviewees were classified as full-time employees in managerial careers and four as working students. Therefore, all respondents matched the defined pre-requirements and were actively employed in Austria. At this point, it can be noted that the actual working hours of interviewees, for the most part, substantially exceeded the given number in the pre-requirements of this study.

In order to recruit a sufficient number of interview partners, the convenience sampling method called snowball sampling (Aspers & Corte, 2019, pp. 320–321; Naderifar, Goli, & Ghaljaei, 2017, p. 2) was applied. As workaholics are largely in denial of their problematic work patterns (Cooper, 2016, p. 109) and are objectively unable to judge their own behavioral tendencies as excessive (Peiperl & Jones, 2001, p. 375), this constitutes a major obstacle in finding interview partners who face overwork themselves. Therefore, snowball sampling appeared particularly suitable, as the method is usually used when difficulties in accessing samples with target characteristics arise. The general idea of the technique is that the researcher asks those interview partners who are readily available to him/her whether they can name any other potentially suitable respondents with similar views on the topic, making the sample grow like a snowball rolling down the hill. Especially in the face of sensitive topics such as the one for this Master's thesis, where the identities of interview partners should remain anonymous, this networking approach is believed to be effective (Naderifar et al., 2017, p. 2). Starting from the researcher's own professional network, individuals who stood out due to their particularly high work commitment or overtime hours were carefully approached, and potential interviewees were then recruited from the network's acquaintances. This process continued until data saturation set in Naderifar et al. (2017, p. 2). As far as this is concerned, one should note that rather small sample sizes are typically sufficient in qualitative research. Since the research object for this Master's thesis required a detailed, in-depth analysis of the subject area, the total number of 10 conducted interviews was found to be adequate, as further qualitative questioning would have resulted in redundant information (Akremi, 2019, p. 325).

Once potential interview partners were available, a scale for detecting workaholism was used to determine prior to potential interviews whether the need to work ceaselessly was present. The used scale, which took respondents a total of about 8 minutes to complete, enabled a straightforward recording of overwork tendencies. It records workaholism by using 20 dichotomous items with labels, whereas respondents choose between "does not apply" (score of 0) and "applies" (score of 1). The employed approach can be described as follows: All potential interviewees received the scale and precise instructions via email and were asked to return it within approximately one week. Following this, the Master's student analyzed the returned scales instantly and decided on the basis of a cut-off score (10) whether the contacted persons were eligible for an interview or not. The degree of workaholic tendencies of an individual was quantified by simply adding up the affirmative responses (Schneider & Bühler, 2004, pp. 1–6). The sent-out questionnaire can be found in the appendix A. Subsequently, all contacted people were informed on whether or not they were suitable to be interviewed, meeting date proposals were made, and further conditions (e.g., online/in-person) were clarified. Table 2 below shows an overview of all respondents included in the sample.

3.4. Analysis of data

After all interviews had been successfully conducted and transcribed, the data were analyzed with the computer-assisted software MAXQDA. Out of the large variety of data analysis techniques available in research practice, the content-structuring qualitative content analysis, according to Kuckartz (2018), was deemed to be the most suitable method for this thesis. Particularly with regard to category development, this technique allows more scope and flexibility in working with both deductive and inductive codes - thus, categories that are applied to the primary empirical data based on theoretical insights, as well as categories that are derived directly from the transcript data itself (Kuckartz, 2018, pp. 97–98; Rädiker & Kuckartz, 2019, p. 95).

The procedure of the content-structuring content analysis, according to Kuckartz (2018, pp. 100–121), is divided into seven separate stages, which the author presents as a spiral-shaped scheme, as shown below in figure 4. All of the steps included in this technique and described below were closely followed for the analysis of the data material for this Master's thesis, using MAXQDA.

In the first step (initiating text work), Kuckartz (2018, pp. 100–101) recommends familiarizing oneself with the data material and writing first brief summaries and memos. In the course of the second phase, data is analyzed by means of thematic core categories (or codes), which are already deductively applied to the available data. As suggested by the author, these core codes stem from the interview guideline used for this study, which itself is derived from the overall research aim and theoretical frame of reference (Kuckartz, 2018, p. 97). In this light, Rädiker and Kuckartz (2019, p. 101) stress that the meaning and relevance of single categories should be

Table 2: List of all interviewees including their characteristics. Own compilation.

| List of interviewees					
No.	Gender	Age range	Status	Industry	Link to Management
1	female	20-25	working student	telecommunication	*enrolled:* MSc (Management) *job role:* Strategic Management Intern
2	male	26-30	full-time	telecommunication (previous consulting)	*degree:* MSc (SIMC) *job role:* Transformation Management
3	male	30-35	full-time	Startup/IT	*job role:* Management position (Startup)
4	male	26-30	working student	consulting	*enrolled:* MSc (Management) *job role:* Consulting Intern
5	male	50-55	full-time	IT	*degree:* PHD (Business Administration) *job role:* Senior Director Sales
6	female	20-25	full-time	Startup	*degree:* BA (International Management) *job role:* Management position (Startup)
7	female	26-30	full-time	telecommunication (previously Consulting)	*degree:* MSc (CEMS) *job role:* Transformation and Strategy Management
8	female	20-25	full-time/working student	technical industry	*degree:* BA (International Management) *job role:* Process Management
9	female	26-30	working student	banking	*enrolled:* MSc (Management) *job role:* HR Management Intern
10	male	50-55	full-time	technical industry	*job role:* Key Account Manager
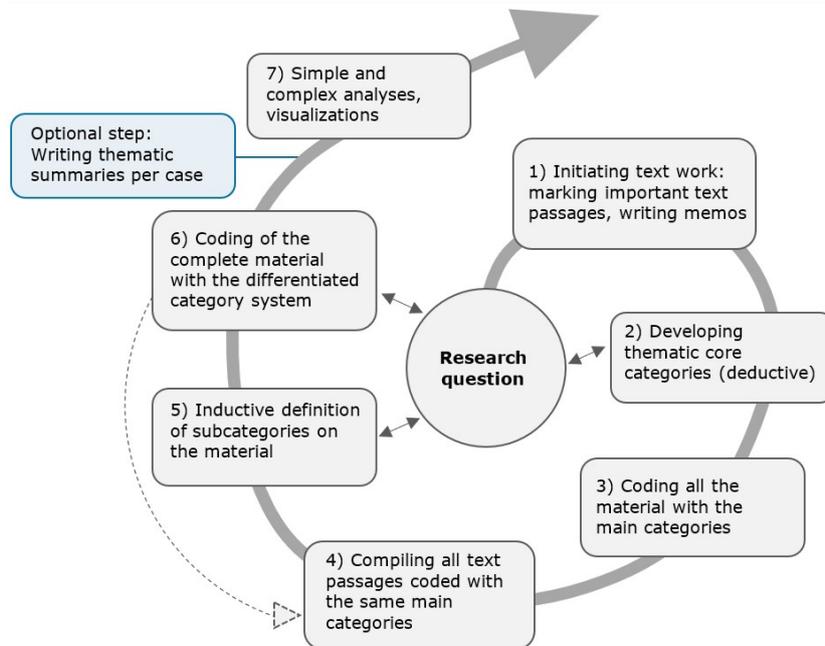
Figure 4: Process flow chart of a content-structuring content analysis. Own compilation. (Source: Kuckartz, 2018, S.100)

recorded as precisely as possible when the code is being developed and further clarified with more details in the course of the analysis. This was achieved by means of category definitions (equivalent to so-called code-memos in MAXQDA) and were used as a reference for the entire coding process. The third step of the analysis method then initiates the actual coding process. In this context, the entire material undergoes another detailed, sequential screening process, and individual, content-relevant text passages are assigned to the main categories (as defined in the previous step). Relating thereto, it cannot be ruled out that individual text passages are attributed to more than one code, as they may thematically apply to several.

Steps 4 to 5 closely interconnect to one another. After the first coding process, all main categories were fully differentiated and consolidated further, as far as feasible. In the course of this (see step 5), new subcategories that emerged from the data material were inductively added, in addition to existing deductive subcategories. Following this procedure, these codes were again reviewed, further abstracted if necessary, and assigned with category definitions (memos). Thus, these six stages resulted in the deductive-inductive category system for this Master's thesis. Finally, the entire category system and data material were reviewed once more in order to ensure that the degree of differentiation was sufficient and precise enough and that all code definitions appeared clear and reasonable, and adjusted accordingly when necessary (Kuckartz, 2018, pp. 101–111). As also claimed by Kuckartz (2018, pp. 110–111), particularly steps 5 to 6 represented the most time-consuming part of the analysis for this thesis, since a systematic, repeated run-through of the entire data material was required – that is, of all ten interview transcripts.

The thematic main categories used in the coding process for this study are shown in table 3 below. The complete category system developed and applied for the analysis of this thesis, including both the deductive thematic core categories and the mostly inductively developed subcategories, are attached to the appendix D.

After the finalized category system was available and the coding phase thus completed, the optional but recommended step of writing case-related thematic summaries was initiated (see blue step). Relating to this, the summary grid/summary tables function in MAXQDA was used, which overall simplified the subsequent category-based analysis of all codes. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that all thematic summaries per case were rooted in original quotes, and the process of writing them did not allow room for interpretation (Kuckartz, 2018, pp. 111–117).

3.5. Quality criteria

The classical quality criteria of qualitative research, which ultimately ensure that empirical work attains sufficient significance and is considered trustworthy, are objectivity, reliability, and validity (Flick, 2019, p. 474). The empirical study for this Master's thesis also lives up to the standards of these criteria although one has to bear in mind that

qualitative research, in contrast to quantitative data, cannot achieve generalizability or representativeness of the results for a given population (Albers et al., 2009, p. 7). Accordingly, also the meaning of these so-called quality criteria differs significantly within the qualitative and quantitative research spheres and poses obstacles especially for qualitative research, as it remains controversial in literature what exactly constitutes their fulfillment (Flick, 2019, pp. 474–475).

Moreover, the transparency and verifiability of the empirical research conducted for this thesis are ensured through this chapter on the methodology on the one hand, which intends to reflect the entire proceeding and executed stages. On the other hand, the validity and quality of this Master's thesis are also ensured through the project documentation. This involves all documents included in the appendix (A-D) of this thesis, as well as the complete project file in MAXQDA, including audio files, transcripts, and visible coding steps.

4. Findings

This section presents the findings of the empirical study. Starting with perceived job demands and resources within the interviewee's current work settings, all categories as well as their subcategories will be elaborated in detail. Verbatim quotes (translated from German) regarded as specifically relevant to accurately reflect the findings, will be included to document observations further.

The data structure of the results, visualized in a very simplified form, is shown in figure 5 below.

As far as the data structure is concerned, categories 2-6 include evidence valuable for answering research subquestion 1. In other words, these categories shed light on individual variables, situational factors, and relationship dynamics stimulating or favoring excessive work attitudes. At the same time, these aspects (C2-C6) may simultaneously contribute to the glamorization of overwork behavior. More importantly, however, category 7 explicitly captures perceptions of and triggers for the glamorization of overwork in pursuing managerial careers (sub-question 2). Moreover, C1 should be considered a marginal category. While it has no direct impact on the research question, it is nevertheless important to capture the workload and current well-being to underscore the overall findings.

4.1. Job demands

Certain job demands should be viewed as an influencing factor and are often responsible for respondents to feel overwhelmed or stressed. The literature-based clustering was also applied to the empirical research for this study, as cognitively or emotionally challenging job demands were identified on the one hand, but on the other hand, also challenging job-specific aspects occurring in the social context or on a physical or broader organizational level. While cognitively or emotionally demanding job attributes were particularly highlighted in this regard, pressures arising through social dynamics are also a dominant stress factor. The following subsections shed light on these results in greater detail.

Table 3: List of thematic core categories. Own compilation.

| List of thematic core categories (deductive)	frequency
Code system	792
Particularly significant areas (markers, no category)	35
C1: Workload and current well-being	26
C2: Intrinsic motivation, personality, general attitude	111
C3: Job demands	91
C4: Job resources	145
C5: Extrinsic motivation or incentives for work behavior	164
C6: Perception/observation of an *overwork climate*	43
C7: Perception of the glamorization of overwork	177
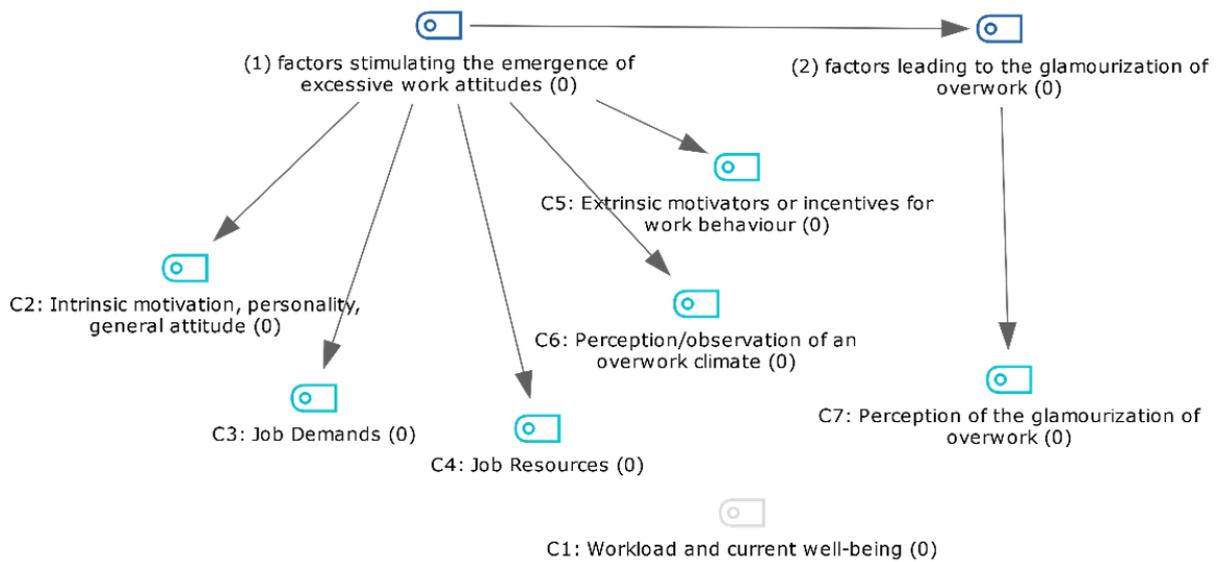
Figure 5: Outline of the data structure. Own compilation created with MAXQDA, based on core categories and empirical results.

4.1.1. Cognitively/emotionally challenging demands

Various job demands were identified which, on the one hand, exert extremely high cognitive requirements on respondents and are thus perceived as straining, and closely linked to this, also have an emotionally draining effect. The manifestations of these job demands that were filtered out as being particularly significant to respondents are discussed in the following.

High content responsibility. The considerable degree of responsibility for tasks and outputs the respondents produce, e.g., in connection with customers or large sums of money, plays a central role and seems to intensify the perceived strain or emotionally demanding effect. In terms of responsibility, perceptions differ slightly depending on the job position of the interviewees. For instance, actively enrolled students classified as career starters report a tendency to feel rather overwhelmed by the high level of responsibility assigned to them, specifically in view of their official role (mostly long-term internships). According to their perception, the responsibility associated with decisions they have to make is often

unjustifiably high. For instance, the following quote illustrates this observation:

> *It's just a lot. And in general, under quotation marks, it's really just an internship. And for such an internship, it's actually an insane amount of responsibility. (Interview 9, item 19)*

Since co-founders and firm-owners occupying management positions were included in the sample, another observation concerning perceived output requirements and responsibility levels can be made with regard to this group. Here, the pressure or demands attached to their work performance appears to be significantly high and closely links to existential fear and uncertainties concerning their own and their team's financial stability. In addition, another interesting finding concerns self-imposed responsibility, which is made possible by a job resource (involvement in decision-making) in the first place. Referring to this, responsibility for work-related tasks or activities is also perceived as demanding and, in

some cases, intensifies the straining effect when respondents consciously commit themselves to take on the responsibility.

High output requirements / workload. Overall, respondents appear to face incredibly high workloads in their positions (often explicitly emphasized as "too high"). In a similar vein, working students fulfill a dual role (as students and employees), which generally leads them to experience high levels of cognitive effort. The fact that they actively perform in two work-intensive spheres – academic and professional – and the resulting overall workload is seen as demanding per se. For instance, respondent 4 (item 13) emphasized that balancing several roles can be quite stressful at times.

Time pressure / lack of time for other topics. The time pressure the respondents appear to be facing seems to have a particularly demanding effect, which can again be closely associated with a high workload. In this light, most interviewees referred to a self-imposed time pressure, which they set for themselves so that the workload does not pile up even further. Again considering the dual role of some respondents (master's students + employees), time pressure also occurs in this sense, as a large variety and number of tasks have to be performed in limited periods of time. In addition, instructions and basic expectations of managers play a significant role as far as perceived time pressure is concerned. In this respect, for example, ad hoc requests from superiors are mentioned, which prove to be a strong stress factor, as exemplified through the following quote:

> But when we, for example, receive very spontaneous requests from our management, or from any stakeholders who want updates, who want to see the first results, then it is often very (...), then it all piles up at very short notice, that's very stressful. And then you notice that everyone is a bit emotionally drained. And everyone is very busy. I would often say, perhaps even overworked to some extent. So these ad hoc requests, so to speak, make it very irregular and exceed the workload. (...) (Interview 1, item 11)

Therefore, the link of this subcategory to relationship dynamics prevailing in the social context becomes clearly evident. Interestingly, there was no consensus that time pressure should be perceived as exclusively negative. Instead, in certain settings, it may have a favorable effect on one's work behavior, and when being bundled with sufficient resources, it may even be considered a motivator. For instance, this appears to be true for interviewee 7, as stated below:

> A certain time pressure rather spurs on. The problem is rather when too many tasks come up at once. Then it can be quite challenging. But basically, I find time pressure, as it is currently given, okay. (Interview 7, item 23)

Unfamiliar, new topics or tasks / variety of tasks. When respondents are faced with topics or work tasks in which they lack prior knowledge or expertise, they generally perceive their situation as demanding and straining. New or unfamiliar work assignments are therefore viewed as emotionally stressful, even if they would not be classified as extremely challenging in terms of content per se. Relating to this, dealing with unfamiliar tasks is perceived as especially challenging when there is a lack of resources to cope with these job demands. This moderating effect of job resources on demands was directly emphasized in Interview 1:

> On the other hand, I also have to take responsibility for (anonymized), for example, which may not necessarily be in my area of expertise. That probably relates a bit to the resource aspect. In other words, a new area of work without having been directly provided with training or colleagues with expertise, assisting me, or helping me to manage it. (Interview 1, item 21)

Team or leadership responsibility. The empirical analysis shows that managerial responsibility for larger teams entails a certain unpredictability that can have a stressful effect since the scope of personnel-related concerns is difficult to control, e.g., illustrated in Interview 5:

> (...) so if you have personnel responsibility, then of course you also have personnel situations that simply don't allow me to say I'm sticking to my plan. (Interview 5, item 5)

In the specific case of firm-owners in management positions, leadership responsibility also seems to have a highly demanding effect, often converting into job strain, whereby parallels can again be drawn to intrinsic influencing factors described in chapter 4.3 (e.g., sense of duty). In this case, the sense of responsibility towards the team seems to take on a much stronger dimension, increasing the perceived pressure on managers further. Nevertheless, since less than half of the respondents already hold management positions with extensive leadership responsibilities, it is difficult to make general observations as far as this matter is concerned.

4.1.2. Socially challenging demands

Job demands arising in a social context can stem from hierarchical structures and/or top-down imposed pressures, but other than one may assume, they mostly have different origins. To provide a rough picture: only three respondents mentioned feeling regularly stressed or strained through interactions with superiors or other people in positions of power (e.g., stakeholders, investors).

Relationship dynamics. In turn, stress or pressure seems to be caused primarily by relationship dynamics among colleagues. For instance, team conflicts or disputes within the organization were mentioned, which were perceived as straining even without active involvement. Furthermore, communication problems also appear to be a central factor in social settings, making relationship dynamics more complicated and quickly manifest into perceived strain. If complex

relationship dynamics impede work-related progress (e.g., of projects through continuous coordination loops), this is also perceived as extremely challenging and draining:

> *Simply that you want to do your very best yourself, but if it is other people's responsibility, there's not always much you can do about it. (Interview 7, item 21)*

Interviewee 4 (item 25) referred to specific perceived peer pressures among colleagues, negatively impacting his emotional well-being. At the same time, respondent 1 (item 19) described the team mentality as one that views high requirements and demanding expectations as very positive and never problematic, which, in turn, proved to be straining for her.

Overall, also these described socially demanding job demands are closely interconnected with other factors or subcategories in the context of this thesis. To illustrate this, consider, for example, the following quote:

> *And then I try, even if I shouldn't, but then I also try to reach the colleagues who are actually responsible for this, even on the weekend. (Interview 10, item 11)*

While here, on the one hand, pressure is exerted on other colleagues, who might perceive such relationship dynamics as stressful or straining, a clear incentive for extra work hours on the weekend is also given (the link between category 3 and category 5).

4.1.3. Physically challenging demands

Lack of sleep / little physical exercise. Generally speaking, physical strain only really appears in the form of fatigue after long working days but does not seem to be problematic. Instead, interviewee 4, for example, (item 23) stated that he feels cognitively exhausted but also experiences too little physical exercise, which may be straining at times. In addition, professional travel activities and high screen time were mentioned as slight stress factors.

However, the fact that ambitious career paths in the business environment may nevertheless critically impact physical well-being was emphasized in two conversations. In this light, the burnout syndrome was mentioned in Interview 10 (item 17, item 41), while respondent 2 referred to previously suffered sleep problems:

> *Or if you really work so much that your sleep suffers, which I actually had when I worked in consulting, for example. Then it would also put a physical strain on me. But that's not the case at all at the moment (Interview 2, item 25).*

4.1.4. Challenging demands on the broader organizational level

High customer / market demands. High pressure on the broader organizational level primarily stems from customer-related concerns or external influences such as market competition. For instance, respondents feel the pressure to be constantly available due to many customer inquiries or touchpoints. In basic words, the interviewees view their tasks as more strenuous or report being confronted with higher demands when a direct reference to customers is given. Naturally, also other factors come into play in this regard and are closely associated with customer demands, such as a higher short-term workload or time pressure.

4.2. Job resources

Roughly classified, the interviewees identified job resources through social relationships, at the task level or through the organization of work itself, and in the broader organizational context. In addition, non-organizational or personal resources were mentioned, which are also perceived as contributing elements to being able to cope well with high work demands and work-induced stress or strain.

Table 4 shows the most significant subcategories into which these individual resource levels can be clustered and the frequency with which they were actually referred to as buffering job resources. The most significant single elements and their implications are described in more detail in the following subchapters.

4.2.1. Social relationships as job resources

Supportive exchange between colleagues. The most significant and frequently emphasized job resources stem from social relationships. More precisely, respondents referred to supportive exchange between colleagues on a professional or technical level and merely in a social, non-work context. For one thing, professional support appears to reduce stress incredibly, and it is emphasized that workload-sharing among colleagues within a supportive team contributes strongly to this. For example, interviewee 3 describes that the support he is experiencing has the following effect:

> *(. . .) the pressure is then shared between several shoulders, so to speak. (Interview 3, item 17)*

Moreover, also respondent 1 seems to view the support on a professional level as very important, which is illustrated by the following quote:

> *I basically think that it's very helpful to have support. In some way, to have colleagues who have been with the company for a longer time, who have more expertise and who can be questioned openly and partly also informally. (Interview 1, item 23)*

On the other hand, the exchange is also highly relevant on a social level – away from task-related matters – and seems to improve the emotional well-being of the interviewees and reduce their perceived job strain. How so is, e.g., explained in Interview 7:

> *For example, with my direct colleague, we often talk about the fact that we have a lot to do, and that is somehow mutually constructive when she feels the same way as I do. (Interview 9, item 73)*

Table 4: Overview of mentioned job resources based on empirical data. Own compilation.

Job Resources	Interviewees									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Social relationships										
Supportive exchange between colleagues (professional + social)	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
Task level / organization of work										
Decision-making involvement/ role clarity	x	x	x	x		x		x	x	
Encouragement, appreciation, acknowledgement			x	x			x		x	
Autonomous work	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
Task significance and meaning		x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x
Task diversity			x	x				x	x	
Broader organizational level										
Trainings and workshops (technical, soft skills)	x			x						
Job security						x		x		
Financial compensation / overpay		x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x
Promotion and career development opportunities					x	x	x		x	
Non-organizational or personal resources										
Self-regulated structure and planning			x	x	x		x	x		
Private compensation				x			x	x		x
Intrinsic resources, previous work, and life experience			x	x	x	x		x	x	

Furthermore, in Interview 2, for example, direct reference is made to the buffering effect that social relationships have in his case on the perceived strain, while interviewee 7 highlights that also the non-work-related exchange between colleagues is considered a basic requirement of the job environment:

> *Emotionally, I would say a very low strain. Because (...), so I would now include something like the team aspect. So I get along great with the team, and that aspect is good, yes. (Interview 2, item 25)*

> *For me, there is no clear separation of professional and private life, especially in the team. I also talk to colleagues about private topics or exchange ideas with them over the weekend. And for me, that's the balance I need to make work more pleasant. Just a short coffee break in between, which was also more difficult in the home office but is always built in. I am definitely the type to do that. Without that, it would not work at all. (Interview 7, item 27)*

Similarly, the importance of social relationships was also emphasized by interviewee 4. Here, however, it was implicitly stated that the exchange among colleagues acts as both a resource and a motivator for long working hours. In this

respect, the connection between different subcategories (C4 and C5) again becomes clear:

> *And I think what a very strong driver for me is whether I feel good at work or not. That means whether I like my physical and psychological relationship environment or not. So if I have cool colleagues who I can talk to all day, sure, then I'll be at work longer. (Interview 4, item 73)*

4.2.2. Job resources on the task level or through the organization of work

The findings further show that job resources are also located on the task level or emerge through the organization of work itself. As demonstrated in table 4, active involvement in decisions appears to be crucial since all respondents referred to this aspect. In addition to this, the ability to work relatively autonomously and the perceived importance and meaning associated with one's work seem to be further relevant job resources.

Decision-making involvement / role clarity. In essence, almost all interviewees view it as fundamental to know exactly which tasks or topics they are responsible and held accountable for. Being involved in the assignment or coordination of one's work-related activities and areas of responsibility is named a job resource. However, only to a certain extent;

there seems to be a fine line between getting involved and overwhelming individuals with too much involvement. For instance, the importance of role clarity is emphasized in Interview 1:

> *And no one (...) fulfills the role in the same way. And that results in a very unclear distinction between the different interpretations of this role. And that was also very difficult for me at the beginning and certainly contributed to this overload that the role was also so unclear. (Interview 1, item 29)*

Encouragement, appreciation, acknowledgement. Encouraging feedback or signs of appreciation by managers are also perceived as a job resource for some respondents. While this aspect could also be seen as an impetus for longer working hours, it was explicitly mentioned as a resource several times, as in Interview 9, for example:

> *And somehow, the praise and recognition you get afterward are worth the work and effort. (Interview 9, item 41)*

Autonomous work. This resource also supports the respondents in dealing with job strain. It is primarily expressed in the fact that trust is perceived by superiors, which in turn increases flexibility and allows personal freedom. This means, for example, that high workloads can be better managed or distributed over time by the employees themselves. At the same time, however, it was mentioned several times that high autonomy could also have a negative effect, especially in connection with certain intrinsic factors. The following comment from Interview 7 explains this:

> *But you have to manage your time yourself, you have to deliver your results yourself, so to speak, and then you just have to find the balance, when is enough enough. Because there is no end to all these topics, I would say. (Interview 7, item 9)*

Task significance and meaning. Overall, the significance and meaning associated with one's job are also considered essential resources and support the respondents in reducing job strain. If tasks or the profession at large are considered meaningful, the interviewees' motivation is correspondingly much higher, which again implies a strong connection to category 5. Task significance shows, for example, if tangible output and a sense of achievement (e.g., evident through sales figures) become apparent. Moreover, if corporate goals are considered meaningful and reasonable, this also plays into perceptions. The following statement from Interview 2 illustrates, for instance, in which way task significance and meaning may alleviate the perceived strain level:

> *(. . .) of course, it could also have an effect on the perceived stress. So, for example, if I have a topic that I'm burning for, then I might sit there until 7 p.m., but I still don't find it stressful at all. (Interview 2, item 31)*

Task diversity. The event of respondents facing many different task areas and activities is generally sensed as beneficial to compensate for job strain. This is because work routines are perceived as less monotonous but varied and interesting. For instance, high stress may be reduced as tasks of varying difficulty can be mixed (straightforward vs. complex tasks). Overall, the picture conveyed by respondents was that task variety leads to more fun and enjoyment and has a strong motivating effect. At the same time, however, it must be noted that this job resource is only considered as such up to a specific limit, as Interviewee 1 highlights:

> *But I would say that a variety of tasks is not always conducive to motivation. So I do believe that it is the case that if you are working on different topics, that basically also keeps you motivated, but I realized that if I have a clear focus on one of these projects, which is already very extensive in itself, I find it easier than working on different projects. Simply because of the focus. (Interview 1, item 29)*

4.2.3. Job resources on the broader organizational level

Training, job security, fair pay, career development opportunities. Job resources that have a beneficial effect in the broader organizational context include training and workshops (from a technical and soft-skill perspective), perceived job security, fair financial compensation, and promotion and career development opportunities. These factors are regarded as mitigating effects on job demands, but they overall often play a somewhat secondary role or are perceived as so-called hygiene factors, i.e., elements of the job that are deemed basic prerequisites.

For instance, certain workshops (e.g., promoting the employees' mental health, as mentioned in Interview 4, item 27) are aimed at strengthening personal, intrinsic coping skills. Moreover, training for new areas of expertise to adequately prepare for complex topics is stated in this regard. Job security is assumed to be given in most cases, although here, company owners or co-founders in management positions represent exceptions. The situation is similar with career development opportunities and salaries, as also these factors are viewed as requirements for most respondents.

4.2.4. Non-organizational or personal resources

Intrinsic resources, previous work / life experience. Similar to job demands stemming from internal desires or characteristics of one's personality, many respondents also referred to personal, intrinsic resources that they had acquired through past work or life experience. Interviewee 5, for instance, provided an example of this:

> *And I think you also asked about the topic of which resources I use. And I also have a lot of mental, active work that I do here with myself, so to speak. So it's like that I work very strongly out of the approach of resilience in customer situations or in stressful situations with my consciousness actively.*

I would consider myself very resilient here, and that helps me, of course. (Interview 5, item 23)

Private counterbalance. At the same time, however, respondents also strongly suggested non-organizational factors, i.e., aspects of or events occurring in their private time, which also help them to cope with stress or strain caused by work. This "private counterbalance," as interviewee 7 (item 25) describes it, takes place in the form of sports, consciously planned rest periods, and through aspects ascribed to the social safety net in the sense of family and friends.

Self-regulated structure / planning. Moreover, personally initiated structures and the planning of work topics, active calendar management with focus blocks, good time management, and a clear prioritization of topics seem to help the respondents. These factors can, therefore, be mentioned as job resources of personal origin.

4.3. Intrinsic motivation for high work efforts

The excessive work behavior or notably high work-related efforts of respondents seem to be strongly attributable to intrinsic factors, which may be viewed as byproducts of the personality or general attitudes of the interviewees. In fact, several subcategories emerged inductively, capturing the intrinsic motivational ground. They are discussed in the subsequent section.

Perceived indispensability of one's own self. The importance respondents appear to attach to themselves to fulfill specific work tasks, which other members of the organization may also take over, can be listed as an intrinsic cause, leading to higher work motivation among the interviewees. Closely linked to this, the data clearly show that respondents generally experience difficulties delegating tasks to others. Instead, they are willing to devote extra hours to carry out their work tasks by themselves:

> *If I'm the only one who can take care of these issues and it's hard for me to hand them over or get help, then I'd honestly rather work more and longer instead of giving someone a training, who will then respond with a lot of questions. (...) Yes. So I'm basically also someone who prefers to do it myself instead of handing it over. (Interview 8, item 45)*

Similarly, the statements below demonstrate that respondent 10 described the experienced importance attached to himself, while interviewee 6 likewise observed this in her professional surroundings:

> *Well, I have to say, before the first burnout, I thought I was irreplaceable. Really, I believed that. Maybe everyone believes that. (Interview 10, item 17)*

> *It is also often associated with importance. Yes, importance - because you simply have the feeling that you are so incredibly important. (Interview 6, item 63)*

High willingness and motivation to learn. The empirical investigation further shows that the interviewees' interest in many different topics and their will to develop new skills and/or acquire knowledge also influence excessive work behavior. In a way, this motivational factor embodies an intrinsic resource, as respondents claim that their work-related efforts pay off if their willingness to learn is satisfied. The fact that such an intrinsic drive is by no means inherently bad but may nevertheless produce negative side effects such as overtime is, for example, revealed by the following statement:

> *But the other thing is when I really delve into a subject because it really interests me, when I do research because I think to myself, I really want to master this well, I really want to understand it. I think that's actually a very positive aspect. This usually results in a lot of work and sometimes also in overtime, but I often don't feel that this is negative because it fulfills me in a way. (Interview 1, item 33)*

Personal aspirations, high (quality) standard. Interestingly, all respondents spoke of a certain intrinsic motivation, the origin of which they are mostly unable to explain precisely. In this aspect, the standard referred to is the basic need to complete tasks in the best possible way and an apparent inner drive towards high demands in both personal and professional contexts. Another subcategory was included in this subcode to assess the rationale for this personal attitude closely, or the "high standard of quality for oneself", as it was literally referred to in Interview 8 (item 41). From setting such high aspirations and standards to compensate for personal insecurities to family-influenced striving for discipline and performance, or standards engrained and adopted from previous work environments, reasons seem to be multi-layered. It should also be pointed out that none of the interviewees perceive these self-imposed standards to be negative. The perceptions revealed in Interview 2 exemplify this:

> *But my standards for myself, well I'd like to always maintain that motivation. (Interview 2, item 41)*

> *To accomplish something can also ease the strain. And that is the mindset I have here. (Interview 2, item 41)*

Urge to do things immediately / fast / not to defer them. Overall, a strong urge of respondents to complete their work tasks immediately or not to postpone them, and to consciously accept working overtime hours for this purpose, also plays a role in their work behavior. At the same time, however, this desire is strongly linked to extrinsic factors, such as e.g., a high workload that accumulates if it is not dealt with in a timely manner.

Urge to prove oneself (to live up to other people's standards). Another noticeable intrinsic motivator favoring heavy work

investment is the urge to prove oneself to or to satisfy the expectations of others. Since social settings and their dynamics come into play in this regard, this also strongly links to extrinsic aspects. The following quotes from Interview 4 and Interview 1, for example, illustrate the intertwining levels of influence eventually triggering this urge:

> (. . .) when you surround yourself with good people, of course then also inferiority-complexes come up, so to speak. To say: What kind of people are they, who are somehow able to perform all day. And of course complexes come up. And then you also want to prove yourself, in order to be able to say that I can keep up with them. (Interview 4, item 99)

> Yes, I think the basic idea has always been to prove oneself. I think this is due to two things. On the one hand, I personally always (...), I believe that I link my self-worth very much to what others think of me. This is perhaps a very personal characteristic, but I notice that it deflects very much upwards or downwards, depending on what opinion I think others have of me. So very dependent on the opinions of others. Or how I imagine others' opinions might be. (Interview 1, item 61)

Self-fulfillment (joy, meaning, fun). If a strong sense of self-fulfillment in connection with one's job is present, which is also associated with fun, meaning, and enjoyment, the intrinsic motivation for heavy work investment appears to be particularly high. In fact, most interviewees also note that they consider their work to be somehow fulfilling, as is the case for respondent 2:

> And defacto, I personally see working in sum as nothing negative but as something positive and fulfilling. (Interview 2, item 41)

In this context, it is essential to note that three interviewees were actively involved in establishing the companies in which they currently hold management positions. In their specific case, the communication about being able to fulfill oneself through work-related tasks and activities was especially emphasized. For instance, two respondents even compared their relationship with their firm with the role of being a parent, caring for a child.

Conscientiousness (commitment / collegiality). There appears to be a very high sense of duty in all respondents; a characteristic that significantly impacts their work behavior. Generally speaking, two levels became evident, at which this feeling of conscientiousness. These are subsumed here as commitment (on the organizational level) and collegiality (on the personal level). On the one hand, respondents mentioned that they have a certain basic attitude towards commitment to the organization and the achievements of its goals. On the other hand, this sense of duty emerges in the social context and stems from relationship dynamics. Linked

to this, respondents who already hold management positions reported that they do not want to disappoint or fail their team and, in connection with this, tend to give their employees the feeling that they are constantly available and present. Within social settings, a high degree of collegiality also causes interviewees to offer support in the form of taking on some of the workloads of team members. Interestingly, this intrinsic factor seems to be particularly heavily weighted, as this subcategory was also most coded compared to other motivators in this category. However, this does not allow for generalizations. To exemplify this reasoning, the following excerpts demonstrate the two levels described above:

> So it's just, I would say that I have a great sense of duty. And if I am part of an organization, then I am already committed and then it is important to me to advance this organization. (Interview 4, item 17)

> Or simply when a colleague needs support, for example. To tackle the social context again. If they have too much to do at the moment and you can take pressure off of them, then that is also a reason to take on more workload. (Interview 7, item 37)

Although the above-elaborated division into individual subcategories represents an attempt to assign intrinsic motivation for heavy work investment to individual clusters, external influences appear to impact intrinsic factors substantially in a reinforcing manner, as demonstrated through several examples. While these personality-dependent intrinsic characteristics are not bad in essence, e.g., the drive to learn or self-imposed high-quality standards, they may develop into problematic factors in connection with other, mostly extrinsic influences. In this scenario, work engagement initially sparked by intrinsic motivational characteristics may grow into excessive work behavior with health-impairing effects. A straightforward example of this was provided by interviewee 10, who reported having already been hospitalized twice as a result of the burnout syndrome (item 9), but nevertheless considers his basic intrinsic motivation to be fundamentally valuable and positive (item 19-23). In this respect, one should take that many findings and thus categories strongly intertwine into account. Complementary to this, all respondents appear to struggle with completely detaching themselves mentally from work and sense a constant desire for productivity, as exemplified through the following quote:

> So it may be that it has improved to some extent, but in any case, at the beginning I couldn't let go of the thoughts of work so easily. So even when I was lying in bed in the evening, I had these thoughts (. . .). (Interview 9, item 27).

This observation should also not be labeled as negative per se but may contribute to mental strain or stress in the long run. In other words, the inability to detach oneself from work could possibly manifest itself in the mental state of feeling overworked.

4.4. Extrinsic motivation or incentives for high work efforts

In broad terms, two types of extrinsic incentives affect respondents' work behavior: motivators arising in the social context and drivers on the organizational level. The hierarchical code-subcode model below (figure 6) illustrates the stated aspects that come into play, with the number in brackets indicating how often single transcript passages were added to the subcategory. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that this gives no indications of the importance of these elements per se.

4.4.1. Social context

Four different subcategories have emerged in the social context, providing a somewhat nurturing ground for overtime or long working hours.

Managers and supervisors. Overtime often stems directly from the management level. On the one hand, people in management positions appear to have an immense role model effect. According to the interviewees, they often exemplify a certain excessive way of working themselves through their late-night presence in the office or obvious constant availability. On the other hand, respondents also feel influenced by their explicit actions and statements. For example, recognition or encouraging comments from superiors are not only perceived as a job resource in some instances but may also act as a driver for extra work efforts. The following statements underscore these arguments:

> _So my direct manager, she already works a lot, where I've often wondered how much overtime she might have. I don't really know. But (...) she does. Actually, this way of working is exemplified. They are really available all the time, even in the evening. (Interview 9, item 51)_

> _And other drivers, yes, this again relates to recognition and compliments. So if the supervisor says to you "Wow, you really did a great job last time, can you do this again quickly now?" - then who would say no? (Interview 4, item 73)_

The expectations of managers - in terms of what managers themselves perceive as standard working hours - are also strongly linked to the work behavior of the respondents. In addition, the workload imposed by superiors often indirectly implies overtime, which means that managers should anticipate in advance that overtime has to be worked, given the amount of work assigned in a certain period of time.

Colleagues and fellow students. In social settings among colleagues or fellow students, the situation appears to be very similar. For example, peer recognition is also mentioned as a significant driver. However, a certain sense of responsibility toward colleagues emerges much more strongly here. Since the respondents want to offer them support or not disappoint the team as a whole, they are willing to work overtime or extra hours. On the other hand, it is clear from the interviews that the interviewees work in a very performance-oriented, ambitious environment in which colleagues also have a high

presence. For instance, interviewee 2 (item 51) explains that colleagues who deliver a comparable workload or are equally present are certainly also considered an incentive for him. Other respondents describe their perceptions similarly:

> _If my neighbor does it, then I have to do it too. So that's how it is, yes. Classic peer pressure. And then there is also this, what do you call it, "presenteeism". So you just have to be visible, that's just part of it. (Interview 4, item 79)_

> _And when they set an example like that, I notice, especially as an intern, where you are oriented toward your permanent colleagues, that it also puts pressure on me to stay longer somehow. And I also notice that I stay longer than is perhaps good for me. Or I stay longer than it might be necessary now, and I have the feeling that colleagues do the same, because going home alone is always such a special act. So I think those who stay longer always have a very good feeling when they are the last ones to leave the office. (Interview 1, item 35)_

Interestingly, this alignment with the work behavior of others - whether colleagues or managers - also appears to occur within online settings (e.g., through Microsoft Teams) since it is, for instance, possible to detect if someone is still online in the evening.

(Desired) professional environment. In order to pursue a managerial career, overwork somewhat appears as a necessity. Hence, there is a strong connection here with the idea of _overwork climates_ (see 4.6). However, what is striking in this context is the repeated reference to the working environment in consulting, in which demanding workloads and vast amounts of overtime seem to be regarded as standard. Interestingly, ex-consultants strongly influence the (team) climate in their new organizations as they appear to bring this specific standard for consulting into their new companies. In a similar vein, the startup environment was also described as highly work-intensive. Overall, the following statement from Interview 1 underscores these perceptions:

> _I think that my studies and also this career aspiration in the business sector already push me into a particular field of positions that are basically already associated by their nature with high work demands. So I don't think that I necessarily always go into a new job, or into a new internship, with the basic attitude that I have to work an insane number of hours. But I notice relatively quickly that somehow my colleagues all work very much. For example, in my case, I really notice that some of them come from consulting, where a lot of overtime is actually standard. (Interview 1, item 33)_

Private context. While the personal environment of the interviewees does not appear to be an overall dominant influencing factor, it may also elicit workaholic behavior. In
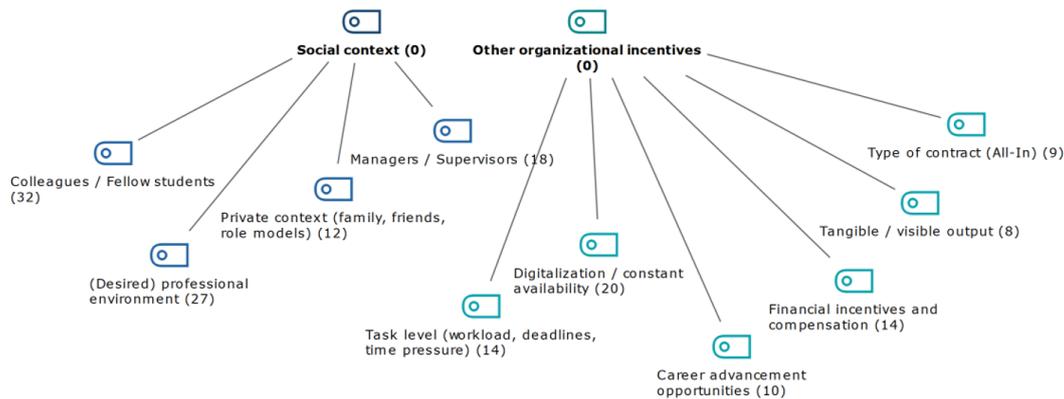
Figure 6: Hierarchical code-subcode-model. Own compilation created with MAXQDA, based on empirical results.

this light, interviewees referred to their upbringing and "basic principles" learned at home and mentioned their parents' role model effect and its impact. Interviewee 5, for example, stated the following:

> And you always think back a bit to your parental home and the father figure and so on. And that certainly also has a strong impact on me. My father was in management himself, and he has already passed away. But you probably always emulate this image a bit, that your father would have been proud of you so that all certainly has an influence, I have to admit. (Interview 5, item 35)

At the same time, however, the respective circle of friends also seems to influence excessive work behavior. This appears to be especially true when friends have taken similar career paths or when colleagues are also personal friends, making work a topic of conversation in private surroundings.

4.4.2. Other organizational incentives

Task level / visible output. Other extrinsic sources of excessive work behavior can be found on the task level. For instance, high workloads and strict deadlines, which relate to high time pressure, come into play here. In this sense, respondents stated that they have a considerable amount of work to do and that it is often impossible to work through the given workload without devoting extra hours. In most cases, there appears to be a lack of available human resources to handle the volume of work. For example, interviewee 10 (item 57) refers to this issue. Moreover, measurable output such as sales figures also acts as a driving force for respondents.

Financial incentives / type of contract. In addition, respondents conveyed a somewhat consistent picture when describing whether financial incentives are causing them to work longer hours. In this light, the majority emphasized that other reasons influence them significantly more, while their salaries still need to be proportionate to their efforts. This means that respondents generally agree that a high wage justifies working overtime frequently. The following statements underpin these general perceptions:

> I mean I just got the call that I am going to get a bonus. And I was (…) I was really happy, but I don't think that's what it is all about. (Interview 9, item 43)

> But if someone pays me more for working more then I honestly say no because my time is worth more. Or just my free time is worth more than any hourly wage I could be paid. (Interview 8, item 49)

> But I also see that I'm in a segment of the income class where I say I don't see it as unjustified if I'm asked to be available for one, two, three, four hours above the 40th hour, yes. And that is this salary component. (Interview 2, item 51)

In this context, six interviewees also linked their contractually regulated payment model, namely so-called "all-in-salaries", to whether financial incentives act as a driver. Generally speaking, respondents appear to view this salary model as one that automatically justifies overtime or extra work. Interviewee 5, for example, mentioned the following:

> Well, we have all-in salaries, which means that the salary form alone assumes that you work more than 40 or even 38.5 hours. And it is also compensated. But the agreements are made in such a way that even if employees work more, and this is also considered normal, that they work more. (Interview 5, item 47)

Career advancement opportunities. Whether career advancement and promotion opportunities are intrinsic motivators for excessive work behavior is not completely clear from the respondents' answers. For many, this aspect seems to play a secondary role. For instance, on the one hand, interviewees mentioned that they hold a satisfactory position or that their career stage is advanced enough already, making this aspect somewhat redundant. On the other hand, those respondents in managerial positions of smaller organizations mentioned that opportunities for further advancement simply do not exist within their given work environments. In similar terms, the group of working students mentioned

that this aspect is not a crucial determiner, especially in internship positions. This is because promotions are generally not expected in such early stages, or permanent positions in their current organization are not a personal ambition. For instance, the following excerpt from Interview 4 exemplifies this line of thought:

> *Promotion opportunities are not such a driver at the moment because there is no position in either organization that I could move up to. But that will definitely become a driver; I know this already (...). (Interview 4, item 73)*

On the whole, one can summarize that the general perception is that career advancement necessitates the willingness to work extra hours, as emphasized, for example, in Interview 8:

> *Especially in terms of career advancement and our societal framework or the idea that still prevails, but that I don't completely agree with. If you want to move up, you simply have to put in more than others, you have to (...) and I think that's simply the point, you simply have to put in more time. I don't think that more performance has to come out of it, but you just have to be more visible in more topics and areas and put more time into it. (Interview 8, item 61)*

Digitalization / constant availability. Another determiner of excessive work behavior is digitalization and associated constant accessibility. This aspect seems to be a major factor, influencing long working hours or extra work. Furthermore, it also comes into play as far as the interviewees' difficulty in fully detaching themselves from work is concerned. In this context, respondent 10 (item 9, item 50-51) even mentioned that digitalization was one of the major causes of his burnout. In addition, results show that the boundaries between the workplace and home are increasingly blurred. For instance, many appear to have access to work systems or accounts at home (E-Mail, Microsoft Teams, social media) through their home office equipment, while some also use their company laptops privately. In addition, some respondents also mention that they are usually logged onto work accounts on their personal mobile phones. This again appears to enable people to work on late evenings or weekends and allows colleagues to read and respond to messages outside of standard working hours.

While the constant availability of respondents is one crucial aspect to point out in this regard, digitalization appears to have further noteworthy implications. For instance, interviewee 5 (item 17) perceives remote work as causing an "increase in density" and mentions that digital work implies fewer rest times. Similarly, respondent 2 (item 59) states that he feels that colleagues and superiors always expect him to be available throughout the whole day when working from home. The following statement made in Interview 1 appears to summarize these general perceptions accurately:

> *And that is once again a factor that is influenced by digitalization (...), so it is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, I think it is more difficult to be present as a result of this digitalization and remote work. You have to actively send out mails again and again, really deliver results, or send updates and so on, if you don't have the physical presence. You might have even more pressure to be even more available and to show yourself even more. On the other hand, I think it also makes you even more accessible and available, which often makes it more difficult to distance yourself. (Interview 1, item 41)*

4.5. Perception or observation of an overwork climate

Based on the theoretical construct of Mazzetti et al. (2016), results further capture whether and to what extent so-called *overwork climates* appear to prevail in the case of respondents, providing a nourishing ground for the development of workaholic behavior (as closely investigated in chapter 2.4.2.1, view for detailed clarifications).

Indeed, the described work environments of respondents appear to show resemblance with an *overwork climate* rather than an *employee growth climate*, although a few characteristics did correspond to the latter. In this context, the two main dimensions of an *overwork climate* were addressed separately to describe this highly deductive subcategory accurately. Thus, it was examined whether and to what extent overwork is collectively viewed as a necessity or standard. Additionally, it was assessed whether and in what way the shared perception is that overwork is not restricted or rewarded. Table 5 below shows the study's results regarding these two distinct manifestations of an *overwork climate*.

This tabular overview provides an outline of the respondents' perceptions and thereby shows whether they have evaluated the named characteristics of these dimensions as applicable (+) or inapplicable (-) to their existing work environment or whether they were could not fully say so ($\sim$).

In addition to this overview, it is essential to take another closer look at the results to explain why respondents drew these conclusions in the first place. As discussed in detail in the literature review of this paper, job resources are lacking in an *overwork climate*, and organizational members face high work and performance pressure (Mazzetti et al., 2016, pp. 880–881). These prevailing conditions overall provide a nurturing ground for workaholism. However, it is equally clear that all of the situational variables and motivational factors presented up to this point - especially prevailing job demands or extrinsic motivators - may significantly influence this climate. Nevertheless, looking explicitly at the literature-based manifestations characterizing these *overwork climates* and answers presented in this regard, the implications discussed below become apparent.

Overwork endorsement. Here, a somewhat clear picture emerges, as the majority strongly agrees that excessive work or overtime is collectively seen as a necessity or standard within one's work setting. On the one hand, this becomes

Table 5: Overview of respondents' perceptions of an *overwork climate*. Own compilation.

Overwork endorsement
meaning that extra work and overtime are viewed as standard or usual and are virtually
considered a prerequisite for career advancement

Applies = +
Indifferent = ~
Does not apply = -

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
+	+	+	+	+	-	~	+	+	+

Lacking overwork rewards
meaning that overtime is generally not rewarded (e.g., feedback, new opportunities,
higher responsibilities), apart from financial compensations required by law

Applies = +
Indifferent = ~
Does not apply = -

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
+	~	-	-	-	+	+	~	-	~

evident through managers' and work colleagues' exemplification of workaholic behavior. Interviewee 1 (item 19-23), for example, notes that she perceives the team mentality as one that views excessive work behavior and pressure in favorable terms. On the other hand, respondents generally expect that their career paths would not be as steep if they refused to engage in overtime. Moreover, for many, the need to work long hours is linked to the fact that the given workload is too high to be performed during usual work hours. This reasoning, as noted above, is already reflected in other categories, indicating that the interplay of many factors, but especially demands or motivational factors stated here, contributes to the emergence of an *overwork climate*. The statements below underpin the arguments from above:

> *But for my specific environment, I would now say, yes, working extra hours is part of it and I think, that is my perception, is also expected by the managers to a certain extent and would have a negative effect on your career path if you were to drop the pen after 40 hours. (Interview 2, item 63)*

> *But we do definitely have a climate where it is completely normal to work 60 hours or more. That is a normal week. So no one says, wow, there is a lot to do; it's just completely normal. (Interview 5, item 47)*

The following statement shows an example of an indifferent response. Interestingly, interviewee 7 uses a reference point to underscore her perception and also brings in the respective type of contract:

> *Yes and no, so I'm sorry, the answer is probably not very satisfactory. I'm still thinking about (...). A*

> *certain degree yes, but not, not to an extent as it is for example in consulting. So by the fact that we also have an all-in contract it is assumed, for example, that we, so for example 10 overtime hours a month. That's definitely required, and I think it's also important for career advancement. But it's not assumed that you work an extra 20 hours a week. It's not required and it's not necessary to achieve something at our company. (Interview 7, item 45)*

Lacking overwork rewards. The results in this second dimension of *overwork climates* do not appear to be quite as conclusive. Hence, the collective feeling that overwork or additional efforts are not compensated or rewarded is not present for most respondents. Interviewee 9 (item 70-71), for example, agrees that her high efforts are compensated through credit or recognition from superiors, while respondent 4 (item 83) views extrinsic aspects such as business trips or events as rewards. In addition, he emphasizes that his organization makes many attempts to increase the value of the organization's human capital, meaning his team and individuals. In this regard, offered feedback and training are stated as examples. Furthermore, the significant overpayment was mentioned as an existing form of reward in Interview 5, as the following quote illustrates:

> *That is not the case, so it is definitely rewarded. Well, it's both (...), so if we assume that the extra work is of some use, and you achieve your goals better as a result. And then we have a variable salary component where it is definitely rewarded that you work more. And we are far, so the collective agreement is more of a joke for us. We are light years above that. And accordingly, yes, we*

have a performance-enhancing and also a wage-enhancing system. (Interview 5, item 49)

Some respondents (indicated by ∼ in table 5) recognize the existence of certain rewards or compensatory elements in their work environments. However, they mostly note that they are not very impactful for them:

> *Rewards, I would say (...) yes, perhaps thanks are expressed for some overtime or when something has been checked off, but also not particularly extensive, so it is kept within bounds. (Interview 2, item 69)*

In contrast, some interviewees noted that they do not feel rewarded or compensated for high work efforts or devoting extra work hours. For instance, the following excerpts from Interview 7 and Interview 1 explain these perceptions:

> *And it's not really appreciated or applauded or rewarded when you work overtime, but it's actually rather taken for granted or expected. (Interview 1, item 49)*

> *That is true, yes. I would have said so because it is not perceived as such whether you have worked these overtime hours, but as I said briefly, it is simply a matter of doing your job well. And I don't know if it's always clear what's behind it. Because in theory, a task often sounds simple, but in execution it is usually three times as complex as it originally appears, and accordingly more time is invested in it than you think at the beginning. And I don't know now whether this translation performance is always known. (Interview 7, item 49)*

Employee growth climate. In line with the theoretical understanding of an *employee growth climate* (see, e.g., Schaufeli, 2016, p. 1058), some interviewees also mentioned individual aspects or features of their work environments that could be associated with such a climate. Examples include mutual empowerment and perceived support within the team. In addition, respondents refer to one-on-one coaching, constructive feedback from superiors, and extrinsic signs of appreciation (e.g., small gifts). For instance, the following aspects were mentioned in interview 5:

> *Each person normally has their own individual coaching session, so their 1:1 meeting with their manager or their manager's manager. And here, of course, feedback is always provided, and is also requested. (Interview 5, item 51)*

Overall, however, there seem to be far too few aspects to classify the respondents' work environments as *employee growth climates*. Instead, the prevailing climate and present conditions appear to resemble the counterpart of this construct, as previously described.

4.6. Workload and current well-being

The current well-being of all interviewees was captured and clustered into three different subcategories (positive, fluctuating, and negative), depending on individual responses. Despite the preceding scale on workaholism (see subchapter 3.3 for further explanations), one could nevertheless not presume that all respondents were experiencing negative effects associated with ceaseless work efforts.

Positive. Very few statements were assigned to this subcategory, implying that few respondents assessed their current workload and well-being as completely positive. Generally speaking, positive aspects concerning the workload were commonly highlighted initially but immediately followed by less positive statements. The quote below from Interview 7 provides an example of this:

> *(...) that's definitely within the scope for me, I'd say. So the working time is not such a problem. I think it's more about when the pressure is there (...). (Interview 7, item 9)*

Moreover, evidence could not explicitly be identified, indicating that work enthusiasts are also in the sample. Although most respondents associate work with fun and satisfaction, they do not quite fulfill the criteria to be fully classified as such. In this context, the following response represents rather an exception, with work engagement being clearly postulated here:

> *I'm not sure if you know the feeling, but for me it's not only work, but it is a passion that's just part of my life right now. So it's basically my hobby and work mixed together. (Interview 3, item 13)*

Fluctuating. When considered collectively, a strong tendency of all interviewees to classify their state of well-being as somewhat fluctuating or unstable became clearly evident. It is particularly interesting to note that three interviewees used a reference point to compare their current situation when justifying why they perceived it as not entirely positive. For instance, the present well-being was compared to a previous severe health impairment due to two burnouts, or to a difficult personal crisis resulting from overly heavy workloads. In addition to this, also previous, even more demanding work environments (mostly in consulting) served as a reference point in describing the current state of well-being. While underlying causes are diverse and link to job demands or lacking resources, most respondents mentioned that their perception is extremely phase-dependent and mostly worse in peaks of projects. The following interview transcript excerpts undermine these explanations:

> *How I feel about it depends on the phase. (Interview 7, item 54)*

> *Yes, but all in all I would like to go down a little bit (reduce working hours), although of course compared to consulting it is already a completely different level, yes. (Interview 2, item 13)*

I: Okay. And is it really the case that you say it's optimal and that you can distance yourself well? So your scope of work is currently suitable for you - do I understand that correctly, or would you not really say so?

B: Yes, I mean, you really try (...) you really try not to look at your mobile phone on the weekend. But every now and then you catch yourself. That you do look at it once in a while. But compared to two or three years ago, I would say that I have reduced it and it is better than before. That does not mean it's less stressful, but it's a different kind of stress. (Interview 10, item 10-11)

<u>Negative</u>.   Despite arguments about fluctuating well-being, certain indicators that most respondents did not cope with their situation particularly well, did exist. Interestingly, most interviewees rather mitigated their negative perceptions by emphasizing positive aspects before mentioning negative elements, by which they purposely or subconsciously weakened their statements on poor well-being. For instance, interviewee 9 (item 9) uses the relatively neutral term "intensive" to describe the situation she is experiencing – a significantly less negative framing for expressing that the workload is not perceived as easily manageable. Similarly, the following quote from Interview 3 shows that respondents had difficulties in articulating negative perceptions in a straight-forward manner:

I would be lying now if I said it was optimal, so at the moment I certainly have far too much to do, far too little time (...) so too many activities in any case. (Interview 3, item 9)

Hence, the workload and well-being of respondents can overall be classified as fluctuating to negative, with few exceptions. While the level of satisfaction with the respondent's well-being was not per se negative, overtime was frequently mentioned yet rarely bemoaned. Nevertheless, the personal desire for a reduction in overtime and/or less workload was mentioned in several interviews. Although this leaves room for interpretation in various directions, one could argue that most perceptions were generally negative but communicated in a somewhat attenuated way.

4.7. Perception of the glamorization of overwork

The findings discussed in this chapter show how the glamorization of overwork is related to heavy work investment in pursuing managerial careers. Prior to the more detailed written explanation in the further course of this chapter, the following figure 7 illustrates the correlation between the investigated aspects in brief terms.

Generally speaking, the given surrounding in which respondents find themselves and the familiarity and trust with their respective counterparts within these surroundings appear to act as a moderating factor for the glamorization of overwork. In other words, depending on the given environment (professional versus non-professional), one specific stimulus or the interplay of several leads to one or both discovered manifestations if the perceived trust is on a low to medium level. Contrarily, in high-trust settings, the glamorization of overwork behavior does not occur.

Thus, the perceptions and behaviors of the respondents were captured with regard to two different contexts. On the one hand, this included the professional environment, i.e., within the organization, among colleagues, or fellow business students. On the other hand, the non-professional environment, i.e., family and non-work-related friends, were considered. Within both environments, two types of relationship levels may be found, roughly differentiated as (+) high levels of familiarity and trust versus (-) low levels of familiarity and trust.

As stated above, respondents indicated they do not glamorize overwork when interacting with people they trust. For instance, this applies to the exchange with close colleagues (thus, in the professional setting) or friends (thus, in the non-professional setting). Hence, if familiarity and trust are high, perceived exhaustion triggered by unhealthy work behavior is communicated honestly and unadornedly. The following interview excerpts underscore this strong dependence on familiarity and trust within both distinct settings:

I can also talk very openly with a colleague, but then I look for the conversation with this specific person and know that this is my person of trust. (Interview 7, item 56)

I think the answers differ here. So with someone I am close to I would talk about it quite openly or perhaps complain a bit or lament a bit in a certain way. (Interview 9, item 73)

I think that somehow depends very much on how the relationship to the person is. I would say that I have one or two colleagues that I am very close to. Where I know they have either already brought it up themselves that they are overwhelmed with something, or that they are uncomfortable with something, or that they are overworked. And as soon as that is opened up, so to speak, it's easier for me to be honest and to say that I'm also overwhelmed with work. And then these are also people with whom I tend to have a relationship of trust. (Interview 1, item 53)

It depends on how close these people are to me. So if I don't know the people very well, it's usually like, "Yes, I work a lot, but it's not a problem. I'm sure it will be over soon. And yes, it's just part of it." (Interview 6, item 61)

Different stimuli or conditions (see figure 7) may trigger the glamorization of overwork behavior when only low to medium levels of familiarity and trust are involved. This applies to both the professional and the non-professional environment.
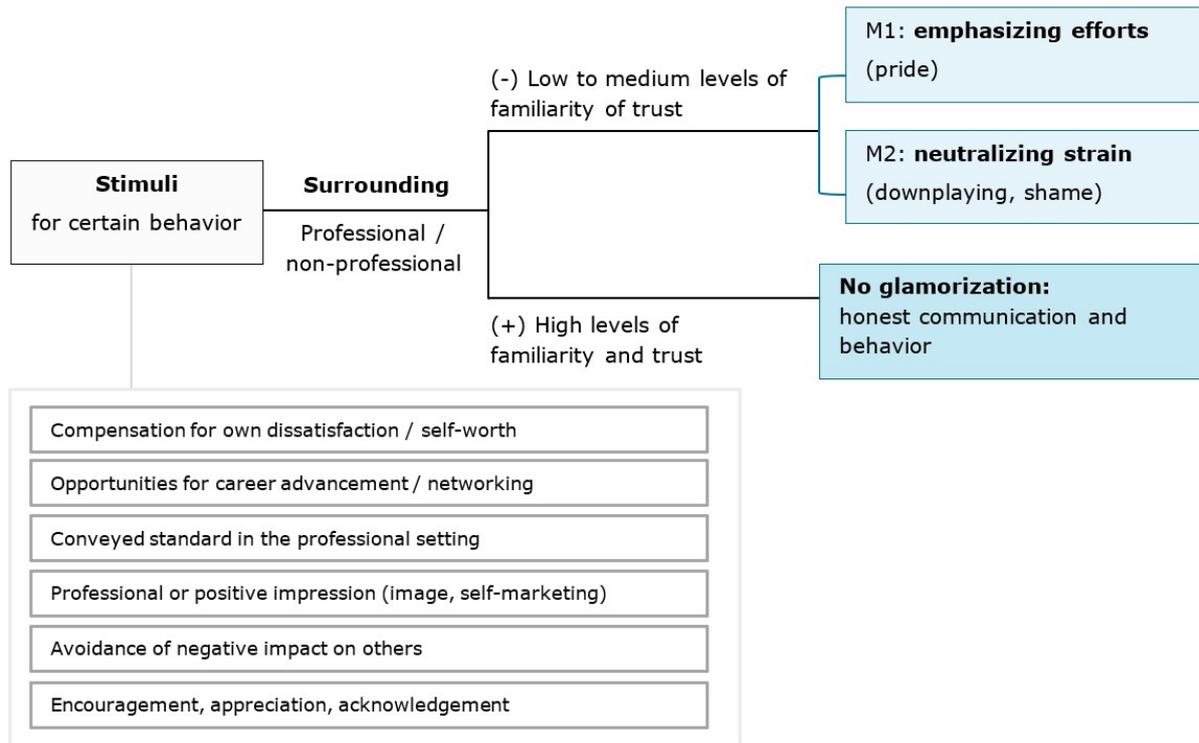
Figure 7: Correlation between different aspects contributing to the glamorization of overwork. Own compilation.

The understanding of this study is that the glamorization of overwork means the false portrayal of excessive work behavior in a positive light. In this respect, the findings show this glamorization may ultimately appear in two different manifestations, which closely link to the given surrounding (professional / non-professional). The first manifestation 1 (emphasizing work efforts) describes the positive connotation of one's excessive or unhealthy work practices in terms of feeling pride and, thus, actively emphasizing one's behavior. In turn, manifestation 2 (neutralizing job strain) describes the positive connotation of one's excessive or unhealthy work practices in terms of hiding or consciously downplaying one's behavior. The specific factors triggering such different ways of communication or representations, which emerged from the conducted empirical study for this paper, are described in the following section.

Compensation for own dissatisfaction / self-worth. A misleading impression of unhealthy or excessive work behavior appears to be often conveyed to compensate for one's dissatisfaction or low self-esteem. For instance, interviewee 8 observed this in her professional environment:

> *I also have some people in my environment who are really only satisfied with themselves when they work 60 hours to 80 hours and even more. (Interview 8, item 45)*

Interviewee 6 also links the downplaying, defending or the embellishing of behavior to feelings of dissatisfaction with oneself, as illustrated by the following statement:

> *The feeling of not being able to achieve as much as others. That was certainly also the pressure to perform. (...) Certainly also a lot of self-esteem issues, the belief that if I don't achieve anything, I'm not worth anything. So a lot of compensation (laughs). Also in the group and with yourself. Yes. (Interview 6, item 58-59)*

Opportunities for career advancement. Perceived opportunities for career advancement also appear to constitute a trigger, albeit not a primary one.

For example, from a manager's perspective, respondent 5 noted that he perceives that communication is often deliberately adapted in front of him:

> *But with the individual team members, for example, it's definitely the case that when they see me and because they don't have the opportunity to see me and talk to me that often, they influence the image I have of them. Then I often have the impression that communication is consciously steered. (Interview 5, item 61)*

In similar terms, interviewee 9 also speaks of an embellished presentation of her work-related strain when talking to superiors, which again relates to potential future promotion opportunities:

> *My direct manager is constantly asking us what the situation is, what the workload is like. I honestly would not dare complain, I wouldn't say it's*

terrible and I can't get anything done. But if there is too much work, then I would tell her. I'm sure about that. But then you have, or I would have in the back of my mind: Yes, you want to be promoted at some point or get another higher position. That doesn't look good, it looks more like you can't work under pressure. (Interview 9, item 81)

The conveyed standard in the professional setting. A crucial trigger appearing in the professional context seems to be that respondents generally perceive excessive work attitudes, high levels of commitment or effort, and overtime hours as the standard in their given business environment. The fact that one's unhealthy work behavior is not presented in negative terms seems to be a logical consequence of this perceived norm for many. For example, three interviewees mentioned that everyone is "in the same boat" when talking to colleagues or fellow business students. This implies that the respondents are somewhat reluctant to complain about their job strain because they feel as if others in the same situation are able to cope well with high workloads, overtime, and stress. In order to not stand out negatively and feel a sense of belonging to such professional groups, overwork may be glamorized. The following statements underpin this line of argument:

So I would say that among business students, or all those who take a similar career path, it's harder for me to say that it might even overburden me a bit, because it's somehow seen as the norm and preserves a bit of a good image if you get very involved in your work. (Interview 1, item 55)

Yes, generally among founders it is the case that you generally work a lot, and everyone is in the same boat. That's really normal, so to speak. (Interview 3, item 63)

Similarly, respondent 6 shared her previous belief that stress and job strain were "part of the game" in her professional environment and names settings with this prevailing belief "toxic cycles." In the following statement, for example, she refers to this:

"Yes, how are you?" is answered with "Yes, I'm so stressed, I'm so overwhelmed," that this is just quite normal in this environment. (Interview 6, item 53)

Moreover, respondent 2 described his previous experiences in consulting and stated that overwork is an inherent part of the industry as a whole. Hence, he believes that honestly communicating the experienced strain or stress produced by excessive work behavior could have serious consequences or could even result in the loss of one's job:

I think there was a tendency in consulting to communicate problems with the workload a little less. So there was more of a tendency to downplay it.

Simply because it was such an inherent part of the company, the corporate culture, and the industry that if you had pointed out problems here, that would really have been a bit of a "kick-out criterion", which simply made it difficult. (Interview 2, item 93)

Professional or positive impression (image / self-marketing). Closely linked to what was previously discussed, the respondents seem to strive to meet this perceived standard in professional settings to convey a positive impression of themselves. Interviewee 9, for example, explains this link:

I think it's just because, in a way, in a professional environment, as you say, you also want to appear professional. (Interview 9, item 77)

At the same time, the basic observation that it is also typical to talk in marketing terms, to self-market oneself within professional settings, was noted in Interview 1 (item 33) and Interview 5 (item 53). Similarly, the perceived necessity to always "show and shine" to achieve a better standing in professional spheres was mentioned in Interview 3 (item 79).

While these explanations focus primarily on the professional context, a few respondents also want to uphold positive images of their work behavior in their non-business surroundings. In this context, interviewee 3 (item 75) notes, for example, that he does not want to give the impression that work is all he has in life. To not come across as a "workaholic", he often portrays his work behavior or stress level as mitigated. In a similar vein, respondent 2 (item 87) mentioned that he often feels the need to justify his excessive work behavior around his non-work-related friends and family.

Avoidance of negative impact on others. Another decisive factor for the glamorization of overwork appears to be that one does not want to affect others negatively by sharing experienced difficulties and strain. In professional surroundings, this seems to be a particularly relevant trigger. For instance, interviewee 8 (item 76-77) shared her perception that fellow students would be unnecessarily impacted in a negative sense if feelings of being overworked were openly discussed. Moreover, managers seem to pay specific attention to avoid showing when work affects their well-being negatively, not to cause feelings of instability among their employees, or to transfer negative feelings to others. For example, the following statements demonstrate this:

I think it's still important to be a bit more careful at work. Because if you are (...) if you are very dissatisfied, that also has a direct impact on the team or on the supervisor. (Interview 7, item 56)

So I wouldn't tell our team, even if I would not be doing well, I don't think I would tell the team. I just have such a high need for the team to simply feel good and also feel safe. (Interview 6, item 51)

There is always the "self-fulfilling prophecy", so to speak. If I now share things with colleagues out of

a momentary situation because I am annoyed by some fact, then the negative is reinforced and I do not want that to happen, because it does not really have the scope, but perhaps the emotion gives it more scope at the moment. (Interview 5, item 55)

Encouragement, appreciation, acknowledgement. If respondents expect to receive praise or recognition for their high work efforts, they also tend to feel triggered to glamorize overwork. In this light, they seem to positively emphasize their excessive work behavior when communicating with managers and colleagues. Of course, this closely intertwines with other dominant stimuli discussed earlier, as this relates again to how the respondents are perceived within different social environments. The following statement from interviewee 4 underscores these explanations:

And then there are the "chatterers" who reveal it quite openly and then also have the need to show how much they work. Whether they embellish it (...) a little bit is certainly always there. Of course, you want to have the recognition of your peers, so you either say I've worked so much, it's so great. Or if the mood is the other way around, that you say yes, okay, I managed this great project with little effort. Yes, it always depends a bit on the factors that also play a role here. (Interview 4, item 101)

Another general observation that can be made in the professional context is that working too much is more likely to be perceived as laudable by others. Accordingly, this may also trigger an active emphasis on excessive work efforts:

(...) someone telling me that I've worked too hard. At first, that is more likely to be understood almost as praise. (Interview 1, item 53)

On the other hand, something like that can very quickly turn into complaining, but also very quickly into pride, if you accomplish all these things and if you manage to do all of that. Yes, exactly. (Interview 9, item 77)

4.7.1. The role of professional social media networks

Since professional surroundings may also be extended to the online world, the role of professional social media networks was also discussed. Indeed, the results show that the network LinkedIn is a crucial factor to consider. In this light, the respondents agree that embellished presentations of work situations, behavior, effort, or work-related achievements often occur. Interestingly, this happens mainly through inflated CVs. At the same time, the respondents also noted that this is not a LinkedIn-specific phenomenon but that the online social network simply offers more room for such embellished presentations. For instance, the following statement underpins these general perceptions:

I don't really look at other people's resumes, but there is definitely a tendency towards falsely inflated CVs, in my opinion. And of course that's

encouraged by LinkedIn or Xing. I think the tendency would have existed even without that, but LinkedIn certainly encourages that. (Interview 2, item 105)

Similarly, the following interview excerpt from interview 5 also helps to underscore this general perception. One may also note that this statement reveals a connection to the theoretical concept of the *triumph of emptiness* by Alvesson (2013) (view the discussion chapter 5.1.2 for further clarifications):

As in private settings, of course, people tend to present a flawless and inflated image of themselves on social networks. Just as with the photos that you see on any Facebook profile or on Instagram, it is just so that it is more of a "shining" than a "being" on there. (Interview 5, item 67)

Moreover, CV comparisons with other active people on the network appear to be quite common among some respondents, which often results in increased perceived personal pressure to perform:

Pressure to perform in the sense of saying, click through on LinkedIn and then kind of see, wow, but he's already done the internships. Sure. That then also creates pressure that you also want to get better, want to do more amazing internships, whatever. It does. Yes (...), yes. (Interview 4, item 113)

It's the pressure to see, oh, this person has pursued a career, he's my age, I could achieve that too, what have I achieved so far? Of course, I've had this thought before. But I have to say that I had it more strongly before I did my Master's degree. When I saw which people did which Master's degree and which positions they got after which university. I let LinkedIn put a lot of pressure on me. (Interview 7, item 71)

I think it increases the personal pressure to pursue a career. Not directly pressure to perform or work pressure (...), but indirectly, of course. So if I have the ambition to build a career, I probably also have the desire to work harder. And by having this transparency "XY has started a new position here, XY has been promoted here" you always compare it more to your own career. (Interview 2, item 107)

In addition to this, interviewee 6 mentioned that she perceives LinkedIn as a self-presentation tool and often finds herself conflicted about whether she should also engage in such behavior. For example, she stated the following in this context:

That I think to myself, okay, is that somehow also part of self-positioning or positioning at all? Or

how much is then also self-staging? And how does that differ? And there's a fine line between, yes, I've just reached the next stage of my career, and then I'm the first to cheer and applaud and celebrate. But on the other hand, such small things are so incredibly inflated and that is incredibly annoying. Everyone is better and everyone has the craziest self-knowledge every day and everybody is better than others and that is really awful. (Interview 6, item 71)

Thus, additional pressures originate from the respondents' virtual social surroundings.

4.7.2. The role of different social environments

At this point, it appears to be relevant to highlight the observation that different social environments may impact which manifestation of glamorization is more likely to be applied. In this light, professional settings seem to encourage the respondents to feel pride in their work behavior and, therefore, positively emphasize high work efforts or overtime (manifestation 1). Nevertheless, manifestation 2 may also occur, especially if the interviewees intend to convince their counterparts that their present stress level or workload is not taxing for them.

Contrarily, in non-work-related surroundings, the tendency to downplay one's work behavior seems to be more common (manifestation 2) to avoid having to justify oneself. For instance, interviewee 2 states that he would never brag about his work behavior in such settings:

Not in my personal environment, no (laughs), I would see it more as shameful, okay shameful is a bit of an exaggeration. But there I would see it more as negative that I work more than 40 hours. So I see myself more in the position of having to justify why I work more. And I also see it that way, so I believe that you should never work more, overtime is not a good thing, yes. And in the professional environment, yes. I would not be ashamed of it there. (Interview 2, item 87)

5. Discussion

This chapter discusses and links the previously presented results to the major theoretical concepts introduced in the literature review of this Master's thesis. In doing so, the proposed research question and its single sub-questions will be answered. In addition to this, the discussion will shed light on this paper's theoretical and practical relevance and implications, further show limitations, and give potential recommendations for future research.

5.1. Results linked to theory

After the findings have been rolled out in great detail in the last chapter, this thesis now intends to uncover selective connections to theory. Thus, the empirical findings will be linked to the most fundamental theoretical models presented in this paper, namely the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and the notion of the *triumph of emptiness* (Alvesson, 2013). Hence, it is not the aim of this work to compare and contrast the entire literature review with the results of this study but to reveal significant implications for the most relevant streams of literature.

5.1.1. Contributions to the JD-R model

The central framework used for this paper is the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), which plays a crucial role in the attempt to explain what stimulates or favors excessive work behaviors (research sub-question 1). In this light, the correlations between job demands and resources postulated in theory (see, e.g., Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, pp. 313–314) were confirmed in the study of this paper: both resources and demands could embody motivators and strain at the same time, depending on the given balance.

While the JD-R model was considered particularly useful in explaining the development of job strain or motivation, with the former being related specifically to overwork according to the understanding of this thesis, there is a need for both enriching and extending the concept according to the studied subject of investigation. Since individuals in the pursuit of managerial careers are at the center of attention of this thesis, the theoretical model is, on the one hand, profoundly enriched with empirical findings applicable to this specifically investigated career path. On the other hand, the model is supplemented with further dimensions for this paper, which were also found to significantly impact the development of overwork but cannot be fully framed into the existing elements of the theoretically proposed concept. Figure 8, displayed further below, shows an attempt to merge the JD-R model with empirical results.

While, in general terms, empirical evidence for the Job Demands-Resources model is abundant (Schaufeli, 2017, p. 121), the dimensions of the JD-R model can be enriched with empirical findings specifically for the investigated context. As visually depicted in figure 8, specific job demands that proved to be cognitively, emotionally, socially, or physically challenging for respondents could be identified in this study. When considered independent of available resources, these demands appear to be the primary cause of job strain in pursuing managerial careers. Moreover, relevant resources stemming from different job-related aspects also play a dominant role. More specifically, job resources relevant for individuals pursuing managerial careers can be found in social settings, on the task level and the broader organizational level. Additionally, they also emerge through the organization of work or on the non-organizational or personal level.

In the attempt to link the JD-R model to the achieved empirical results, the theoretical concept shows potential to be extended, particularly when it is applied to make sense of the development of excessive work attitudes. Hence, based on the findings of this paper, one could argue that the standalone dimensions of the JD-R model (namely, resources and
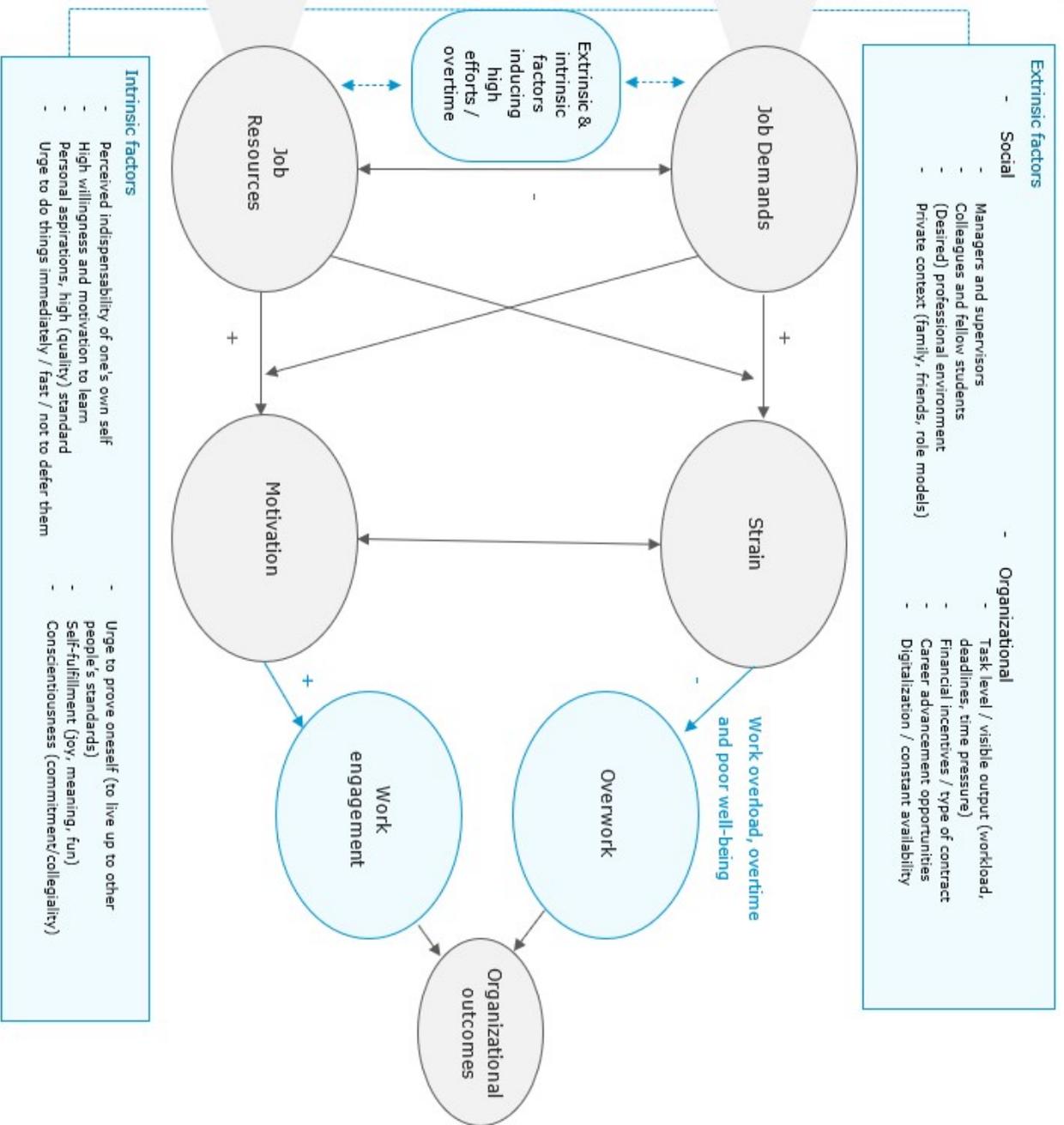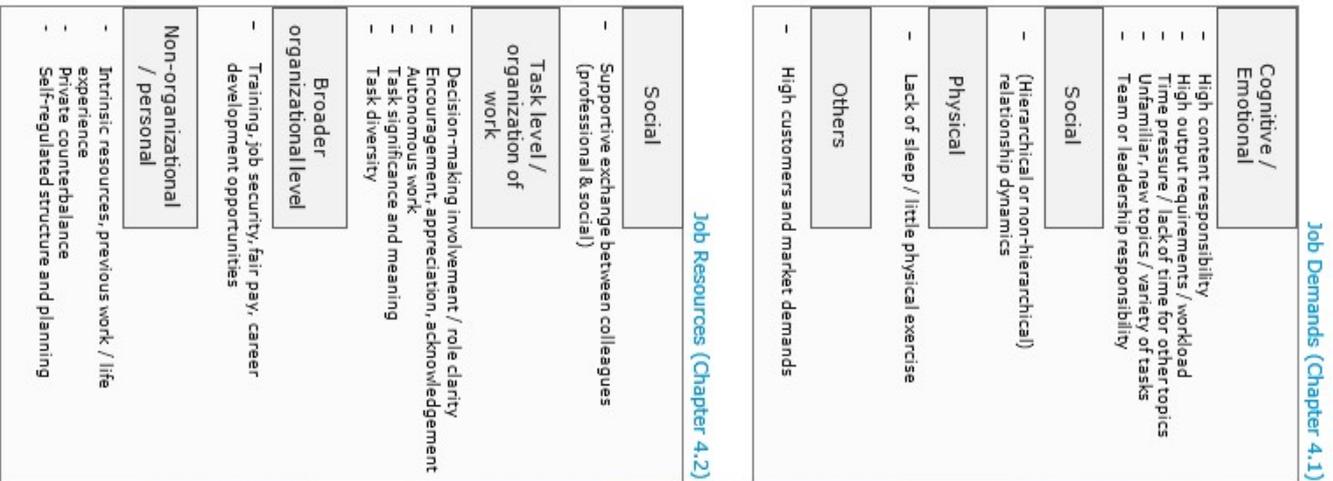
Figure 8: Adaption of the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 313) according to empirical results and the study context. Own compilation.

demands) are not sufficient to explain what stimulates or favors the emergence of excessive work attitudes but instead primarily show how job strain or poor well-being develops. However, overwork is mostly also associated with working long hours (Burke & Cooper, 2008, pp. 74–75). Therefore, also reasons exposing why overtime hours are commonly worked should be considered in order to achieve a holistic view. In this regard, similar to what literature postulates, individual work values (see, e.g., Mazzetti et al., 2020, p. 3) and the role of social settings (see, e.g., Burke & Cooper, 2008, p. 102; Sussman, 2012, p. 5) appear to be of significant importance in the attempt to understand the development of excessive work behavior in the pursuit of managerial careers. Thus, in addition to the previously outlined enrichment of the model, including new dimensions appears to be crucial to answering sub-question 1 adequately. The dimensions specifically added and framed into the Job Demands-Resources model for the context of this thesis are highlighted in blue in figure 8. While the boundaries between the existing aspects and the newly added dimensions of the model blur, it is still essential to distinguish between these influencing factors and to consider them separately.

As visible in figure 8, extrinsic factors are added, which act as a trigger or incentive for respondents to devote such high work efforts and/or to be willing to work overtime. Such extrinsic motives arise, for example, through interactions with colleagues, fellow students, or managers, but also appear in private social settings. Moreover, influencing factors are located at the broader organizational level (see chapter 4.4). Hence, what is meant here as an extrinsic influencing factor may simultaneously represent a job demand but not necessarily does so. Instead, the extrinsic factors are primarily considered triggers for long working hours and high work efforts. Similarly, intrinsic factors (see chapter 4.3) were also found to be highly relevant for the development of excessive work behavior and are therefore integrated into the existing JD-R model. For instance, the intrinsic desire to take care of assigned tasks immediately instead of deferring them appears to be a crucial personality-related intrinsic factor that is not considered by the existing theoretical concept.

Another extension becomes apparent on the right end of the visually displayed JD-R model. Here, *overwork* and *work engagement* were added to facilitate the interpretation of the concept in the context of this thesis. As already highlighted in chapter 2.4.1, Bakker and Demerouti (2007, p. 313) state that dual processes may lead to job strain or motivation. According to the definition of overwork in this paper, the state of being overworked can therefore be seen as the result of the postulated health impairment process. Contrarily, the motivational process is likely to result in a state of work engagement. The latter adaption, thus, the supplementation of the model with work engagement, is already proposed in several streams of literature (Schaufeli, 2017, p. 121).

Furthermore, the empirical study also assessed whether *overwork climates,* according to the understanding of Mazzetti et al. (2016), exist in the respondents' work environments. Therefore, a clear link to existing theory is also evident in

this regard. However, one could argue that these findings (see chapter 4.5) have a somewhat overarching character and are therefore reflected in the dimensions of the JD-R model, making their integration redundant.

Interconnection between different dimensions

The following section aims to facilitate the understanding of the interplay between the individual dimensions of the JD-R model, including their supplemented dimensions. In doing so, it attempts to disentangle the demonstrated results and explain their relationships to one another.

First, as Bakker and Demerouti (2007, p. 312) also suggested, job demands and job resources are closely interconnected. Nevertheless, to identify all relevant aspects, the prevailing job resources and demands within the respondents' work environments were addressed separately in the empirical interviews. However, the data analysis process clearly showed that these individual dimensions (i.e., resources and demands) should not be considered completely independently of one another, as they may take on both roles. Therefore, these interaction effects and the different potential outcomes (i.e., motivation vs. strain) made assessing single job demands and resources within the respondent's work settings highly complex. To make this observation more tangible, let us consider an example from the data set. Interviewee 7 (item 23), for instance, noted that time pressure (= job demand) is generally perceived as an incentive and usually spurs her on. Thus, this clearly shows that job demands can also have motivational potential when bundled with specific resources. Conversely, another example illustrates a similar effect as far as resources are concerned: In this light, this study found that task variety, although generally considered a job resource, may also have a straining effect. For example, Interviewee 1 (item 29) noted that she does not perceive this aspect as beneficial, but she mostly feels that task variety instead contributes to the perceived overload. In other words, the results of this paper also clearly show that job resources may have a taxing effect on individuals.

As noted on several occasions, overwork is mostly but not always associated with long working hours (see, e.g., Burke & Cooper, 2008, p. 65,74-75). However, all respondents included in the sample indicated that they regularly devote overtime hours to their jobs, which allowed room to assess why they felt the urge or pressure to do so in the first place. While high job demands largely already imply long working hours, other intrinsic and extrinsic factors were also found to be relevant to consider. The following figure intends to ease the understanding of this interplay and reduce the complexity of the discussed links between the single aspects tackled in this paper:

To illustrate the interconnection between these single dimensions, consider, for example, the influence of colleagues within social settings. For one thing, colleagues were found to often transmit high job demands on others, for instance, through demanding expectations. Considered individually, this demand may have a reinforcing effect (+) on job strain
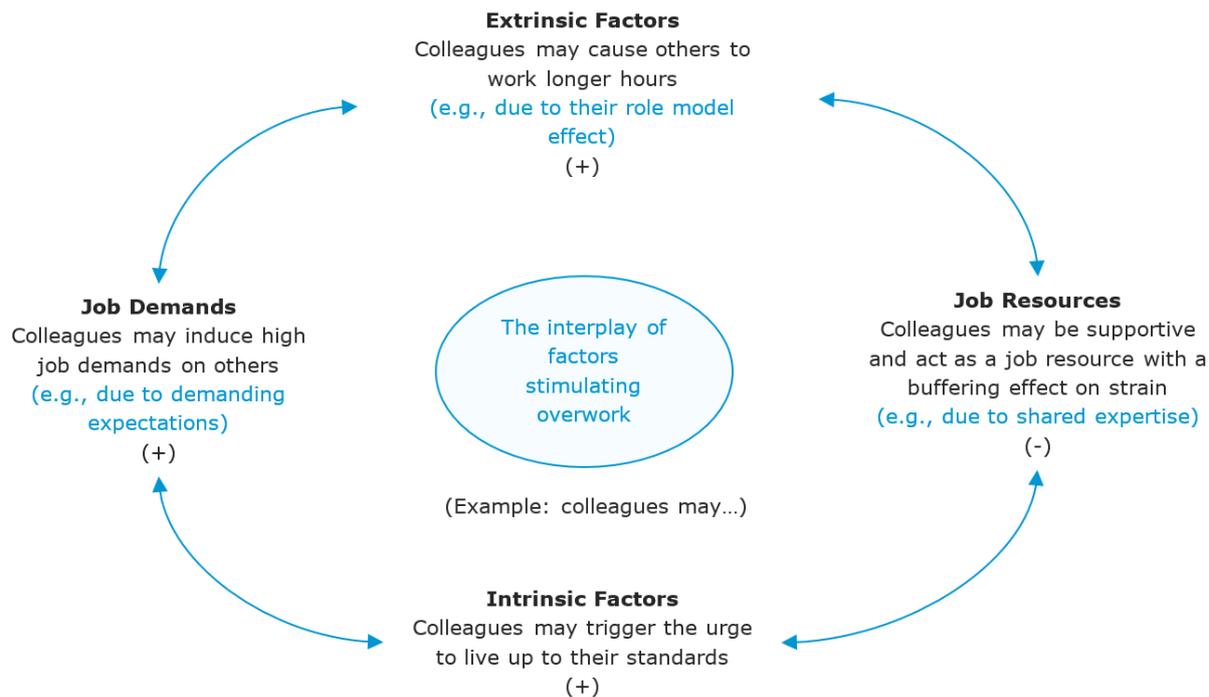
Figure 9: Interplay between factors stimulating overwork, using the example of influence through colleagues. Own compilation.

and thus, stimulate overwork. Nevertheless, the support of colleagues was also found to be a crucial job resource for the majority of respondents. For instance, shared expertise or knowledge was perceived as extremely helpful in the face of high demands. In this sense, colleagues have a buffering effect on job strain and may reduce the likelihood of overwork (-).

Although or perhaps because colleagues appear to be significant resources within organizational settings, they often have a role model effect on others. If excessive work behavior is observed, this could thus lead to mirroring of behavior and, in turn, lead to the unconscious promotion of overwork among colleagues (+). In addition, intrinsic factors should be considered, as they were also found to evoke the motivation for excessive work attitudes among the respondents. In the illustrated example, the urge to live up to the standards or expectations of colleagues constitutes a crucial stimulus for overwork (+). Although especially this intrinsic factor intertwines extremely closely with perceived demanding expectations (job demands), it nevertheless contains standalone importance. After all, one cannot assume that high job demands triggered by colleagues automatically generate the urge to fulfill them.

Nevertheless, one should bear in mind that figure 9 merely represents an example to illustrate the interrelationships and the complexity of single stimuli or influencing factors. Thus, this demonstrated interplay is not only applicable for the given example of relationship dynamics with colleagues but also other stimuli to overwork. The findings chapter makes several remarks in this regard. The extent

to which these single dimensions influence excessive work behavior is found to strongly depend on the given organizational or team setting, the situation, and the concerned person itself, including his/her intrinsic motivation and values.

5.1.2. Contributions to the triumph of emptiness

This thesis is further concerned with investigating how the glamorization of overwork arises from heavy work investment in the pursuit of managerial careers (research subquestion 2). In this respect, chapter 4.7 sheds light on the empirical results and visualizes the depicted relationship between the single influencing factors. Hence, as already presented in the findings, specific stimuli within the professional and non-profession environments may trigger the glamorization of overwork, with the respective individually perceived level of familiarity and trust to one's counterpart acting as a moderating factor. In turn, if high levels of familiarity and trust are present, the glamorization of excessive work behavior does not seem to occur.

As outlined in the literature review, the second central theoretical concept used for this Master's thesis is the notion of the *triumph of emptiness* (Alvesson, 2013). Indeed, the empirical results confirm in several aspects that Alvesson's ideas can be applied to the context of overwork. In addition to this, the findings of this paper show that Alvesson's manifestations of the *triumph of emptiness* should also be extended to the virtual context for the present subject of study. Thus, as Alvesson's notion traces back to the year 2013, the role of online platforms such as LinkedIn was arguably much less

significant than in today's world, which may explain why the author fully avoids including such aspects into consideration. However, given the enormous reach of LinkedIn (LinkedIn, n.d.), one may argue that *grandiosity, zero-sum games,* and *illusion tricks* take on a much broader dimension than initially postulated. Nevertheless, the glamorization of overwork on such online platforms happens largely in an indirect manner, by drawing comparisons with other professionals. The following section will explain how the single theoretically proposed manifestations of the concept link to the findings of this paper.

Grandiosity

According to Alvesson (2013, p. 8), the most important theme of the overall concept is *grandiosity*. As already explained in chapter 2.5.2, this manifestation is characteristic of our modern society, at least in the author's understanding. Thus, according to Alvesson (2013, pp. 8–9), attempts to glorify circumstances, situations or facts, to portray oneself in the most appealing or attractive way possible, are typical. Interestingly, several respondents referred directly to this notion by implying that embellishment is something they frequently encounter, not only related to work behavior but in principle. Accordingly, also the proposed links between the glamorization of overwork and *grandiosity* suggested in chapter 2.5.2 were clearly shown.

Moreover, the findings of this thesis reveal that what Alvesson (2013, pp. 8–10) describes as *grandiosity* also appears frequently on LinkedIn. In this light, respondents referred to individual postings or job position descriptions. For instance, a respondent indicated that *grandiosity is* anticipated as somewhat typical behavior in the off- and online world (view direct quote in findings chapter, page 62, Interview 5, item 62). In short, one could therefore argue that the glamorization of excessive work attitudes is partly due to the fact that *grandiosity* is simply a prevalent phenomenon in our society and thus, occurs in general terms, regardless of context.

Zero-sum games and illusion tricks

The in chapter 2.5.2 anticipated relationships between Alvesson's *zero-sum games*, *illusion tricks* and the glamorization of overwork were also largely confirmed by the empirical data. Since both manifestations appear to be heavily interwoven in practice, they will be discussed jointly in the following section.

For one thing, the results indicate that respondents feel strongly influenced and pressured by the career steps and achievements of others. Thus, in Alvesson's understanding (2013, p. 4), this is due to *zero-sum games*, as personal utility or satisfaction is measured in relation to others. In this context, LinkedIn seems to play a crucial role, as the social network makes comparisons of one's own achievements and career path in relation to others possible in the first place. Moreover, as already disclosed in the findings (see chapter

4.7.1), such a "CV benchmarking" seems common in the pursuit of managerial careers and typically results in high personal pressures to achieve similar outcomes.

Closely linked to this, the results indicate that Alvesson's concept of *illusion tricks* (2013, pp. 15–16), mainly in the form of inflated CVs, is also often employed on LinkedIn. In this regard, a particularly interesting finding associated with both manifestations of Alvesson and the social network should be pointed out: While the general perception is not that work efforts appear to be explicitly emphasized and glamorized, posted career steps or achievements of others seem to cause stress for many, despite their apparent awareness that much of the visible content is substantially inflated. Overall, this may, therefore, also contribute to the feeling of overwork or promote excessive work behavior among such individuals. Thus, a negative reinforcing effect may be assumed, especially due to the glamorization of overwork.

In this context, another noteworthy observation should be mentioned. Although a scale detecting workaholism was used prior to the interviews and hereby achieved scores of respondents imply that there a tendency towards a somewhat unhealthy work behavior exists, the well-being and workload of the interviewees were not communicated as something overly negative (also view chapter 4.6). In turn, this may result from self-deception, which according to Alvesson (2013, p. 18), closely links to *illusion tricks*. Relating to this, literature agrees that workaholism entails that those affected are largely in denial of their problematic behaviors and commonly fail to recognize their work patterns in negative terms (Cooper, 2016, p. 109; Peiperl & Jones, 2001, p. 375). Hence, if workaholics unconsciously deceive themselves through the use of *illusion tricks*, to the extent that they put their excessive work efforts in a positive light or view it as markers of their professional success while ignoring the negative consequences they are affected by, one may debate that they may likewise be disposed to deceive others. Based on this reasoning, the glamorization of overwork may therefore be self-deception in the first place, and accompanying this, those affected may be prone to mislead their social surroundings, possibly without any bad intentions.

5.2. Relevance and practical implications

This Master's thesis provides clear evidence on the causes of overwork and the triggers for the glamorization of heavy work investment towards others, specifically in managerial careers. Therefore, the findings add to the body of literature in the areas of workaholism, work addiction, and related fields. More specifically, research conducted for this study contributes to filling several gaps in research. As theoretical developments on the origins or antecedents of workaholic behavior are still lacking (Burke & Cooper, 2008, p. 61; Douglas & Morris, 2006, p. 394), particularly in specific areas such as the socio-cultural context of those concerned (Mazzetti et al., 2020, p. 13), the closer investigation of this study appears highly relevant. Moreover, the research interest in the glamorization of such overwork behaviors remains virtually unaddressed in present literature, mak-

ing the empirical and theoretical contributions of the Master's thesis particularly valuable. Thus, the first novel contribution of the paper is the detailed identification of the relationships between different causes of overwork, including intrinsic personality-related triggers and extrinsic or environmental factors. In this light, one can summarize that these aspects collectively determine workaholism. Furthermore, the given explanation of why workaholic behaviors may be publicly glamorized represents the second major contribution to existing literature.

This paper has several practical implications for individuals in management positions (managers) and those aspiring to pursue this career path. By understanding the causes of overwork, measures towards avoiding such behaviors may be taken in organizational settings. Thus, the thesis provides detailed information on the conditions and aspects in the organizational or socio-cultural context in and outside firms that have extremely amplifying effects in promoting unhealthy work practices. Since the empirical investigation of the Master's thesis was dedicated to individuals working in or currently pursuing managerial careers, implications also become visible on a job-specific level, meaning that job demands inducing overwork and job resources, reducing the costs of workaholic behavior, were identified.

Therefore, anticipated recommendations for managers that can be derived from the contributions of this thesis are expected to help them build organizational settings that positively foster work engagement but have an adverse effect on unhealthy work attitudes. Similar implications have already been established by previous research. For instance, Binkley and Levine (2019, pp. 491–492) introduced several factors managers can leverage to build burnout-resistant work environments. Thus, this thesis also adds to the existing body of research in this regard.

Furthermore, reasons that could lead other managers to glamorize overwork can be identified and – at least to a certain extent – averted at an early stage based on the demonstrated results. Thus, this study's findings help prevent such unhealthy behavior from having an exemplary effect on other people or from being imitated within one's social environment.

5.3. Limitations and recommendations for future research

Overall, this Master's thesis focused on the downside of high work efforts and discussed theoretical and practical implications primarily on its negative side. In this respect, the basic idea of this thesis is to filter out the major influencing factors that lead to strain or negative well-being (= the state of being overworked) to potentially provide starting points for change. Therefore, the awareness of factors contributing to overwork may also help to foster the positively connotated work engagement. However, this thesis does not tackle the concept of work engagement in the necessary depth - neither theoretically nor empirically – to allow conclusive statements about its development per se. Although the adapted JD-R model (view figure 8) includes work engagement as a dimension, one must still consider that this paper primarily explains

the development of unfavorable work behaviors. Moreover, the concept of work intensification remains practically unconsidered in this thesis, apart from its brief description in chapter 2.2.3. However, the empirical results show that high workloads appear to influence overwork significantly, which closely relates to work intensification (Bunner et al., 2018, p. 2). Consequently, future research could devote more attention to both work engagement and work intensification in their studies, considering these limitations.

Furthermore, as far as theoretical concepts are concerned, the findings of this Master's thesis would have also allowed being linked to the Job Characteristics Theory (JCT) by Oldham and Hackman. The core proposed job characteristics of the authors' approach (i.e., skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, job-based feedback) contribute to the perceived meaningfulness of work (Oldham & Hackman, 2010, p. 464). Interestingly, they can also be found in this study's findings. Here, they mostly constitute job resources, buffering the experienced job strain. Like the role of job resources in the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, pp. 313–315), the JCT assumes that these characteristics ultimately motivate individuals to perform their jobs (Oldham & Hackman, 2010, p. 465). Likewise, the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Gagné & Deci, 2005) could have also been considered in view of this study's findings, especially since both intrinsic and extrinsic incentives or triggers for overwork and its glamorization were identified. Generally speaking, the SDT distinguishes between two forms of motivation, namely autonomous and controlled motivation. The theory refers to the fact that behavior can be clustered into different categories, depending on whether the motivation stems from a voluntary and intentional background (autonomous) or whether it is controlled and, thus, primarily influenced by extrinsic factors. For instance, the SDT postulates that behavior can be externally regulated, meaning that it is fully induced and maintained by external factors or events (Gagné & Deci, 2005, pp. 333–334). Hence, future research is encouraged to address these conceptual linkages to the JCT, the SDT, and potential other theories of work motivation. This would further allow for a theoretical condensation of the results of this thesis.

In a similar vein, the limited scope of this thesis did also not allow for a close investigation of gender or cultural differences. Nevertheless, associated factors such as the family situation or cultural imprints may play a significant role in overwork. While one may argue that the empirical study conducted for this thesis indicates that specific differences between men and women do exist, these are merely assumptions. Consequently, future research could also address these issues.

In addition to limitations concerning the scope of this Master's thesis, the empirical investigation conducted should also be critically reflected. While the sample size itself proved to be sufficient, one may criticize the fact that different subsamples emerge due to the two distinct included perspectives (i.e., of Master's students in the pursuit of managerial careers vs. individuals actively pursuing managerial careers). This

again implied that the respondents for the empirical study were facing different career stages. However, this may indeed be a crucial factor to consider. For instance, one may assume that opportunities for career advancement or promotions may not be as relevant at a relatively mature career stage or age. At the same time, they may significantly influence students at the beginning of their career ladder. Furthermore, one should note that not all interviewees faced active managerial responsibilities due to the inclusion of students in the sample. Although qualitative research generally does not intend to achieve the generalizability of statements, one may acknowledge that the inclusion of these two perspectives made it difficult to draw broader conclusions.

Moreover, the empirical study did consider the respondents' working environment characteristics (e.g., startup vs. corporate group) or the given organizational or team structures (e.g., hierarchical structure, size). On the contrary: the sample consisted of individuals with various backgrounds, which may also be viewed as a limitation. Hence, one could assume that more accurate results could be obtained if the context is limited to one specific organizational structure, industry, or respondent's position and the sample criteria are adjusted accordingly. Moreover, by pre-specifying such individual circumstances, one could further ensure that similar influencing factors impact the respondents (e.g., similar power structures) and that similar career paths are being pursued. Indeed, the conducted interviews showed that such clustering is reasonable. While some respondents, for instance, were occupied in organizational settings where they actively had to work their way up to management positions within existing structures, two interviewees reached their managerial positions due to the co-founding of startups. Consequently, future research is recommended to investigate these subgroups independently, according to career maturity or generation, work environment, industry, or organizational structure.

Additionally, one must again emphasize that the topic itself is somewhat sensitive and may have presumed respondents to expose a vulnerable side. While this also made it challenging to recruit interview partners in the first place, a limitation also emerges in this respect. Thus, as already emphasized previously in this paper, overworked individuals are often unaware of their unhealthy behavior (Cooper, 2016, p. 109; Peiperl & Jones, 2001, p. 375). Therefore, one may also assume that they might struggle to be self-reflective when discussing the issue. In this light, one could further argue that this also applies to the respondents in the sample. Moreover, if interviewees had an overall tendency to glamorize their behavior, they might also have consciously or unconsciously glamorized or downplayed their work efforts when being interviewed.

Finally, future research should consider tackling this topic in broader studies. For example, an accompanying observation of individuals over the course of multiple years would allow a better objective assessment of the demands and stress levels they are facing. Although stressful work situations were also discussed in this study's interviews, one may assume that the assessment of the respondent's personal well-being at the time of such taxing situations is somewhat distorted due to the progression of time.

6. Conclusion

Whereas assessing the reasons and causes behind the development of overwork behavior proved to be highly complex, given the extensive range of research that could have been linked to the phenomenon, this Master's thesis aimed to provide evidence of crucial influencing factors on overwork and its glamorization. In this light, it is argued that the interplay of the closely intertwined job demands, job resources, and further intrinsic and extrinsic factors lead to the state of being overworked in the pursuit of managerial careers. Here, the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) serves as a fundamental concept, with the single theoretically proposed dimensions being condensed and extended with relevant factors specifically applicable to the context of this study.

Apart from specific job characteristics, one's social setting within professional spheres seems to have a powerful influence on behavior. Since relationship dynamics occurring in such settings may lead to imposed demands or a perceived need to conform to peers, excessive work attitudes are likely to result. However, the role of one's social environment may also be a supportive one, meaning that relationship dynamics also serve as crucial resources. In addition, this paper finds that also personality-related intrinsic factors significantly influence the development of overwork behavior. Figure 8 summarizes these findings and their interconnection with the JD-R model.

As far as the glamorization of overwork is concerned, novel explanatory approaches and observations emerge from this Master's thesis. First, it could be shown that two different manifestations of glamorization can be distinguished. While excessive work behavior is primarily emphasized and associated with pride within professional surroundings (i.e., one's workplace or academic environment), there is a tendency to hide or neutralize work behavior within personal settings. Second, the results indicate that the glamorization of overwork behavior strongly depends on perceived trust levels. In fact, high-trust settings, occurring in the professional and non-professional context, foster honest communication and rarely glamorization. Figure 7 outlines how the glamorization of overwork may arise from heavy work investment, especially in pursuing managerial careers. Since the role of the glamorization of overwork is rarely addressed in academic spheres and may therefore be underestimated in the current literature, the uncovered results appear particularly valuable.

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